

THE STRAITS TIMES

Trump reveals summit plan in State of the Union address; seaside city of Da Nang a likely venue

President Donald Trump and North Korea's Chairman Kim Jong Un are set to meet in Vietnam from Feb 27 to 28, President Donald Trump told Congress in his second State of the Union address.

“As part of a bold new diplomacy, we continue our historic push for peace on the Korean peninsula,” Mr Trump said in the annual speech, mandated by the Constitution, to a joint sitting of Congress. “Our hostages have come home, nuclear testing has stopped, and there has not been a missile launch in 15 months.

"If I had not been elected Presi-

dent of the United States, we would right now, in my opinion, be in a major war with North Korea with potentially millions of people killed.

"Much work remains to be done, but my relationship with Kim Jong Un is a good one. And Chairman Kim and I will meet again on Feb 27 and 28 in Vietnam."

The remarks came in a wide-ranging speech close to 1½ hours long, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Vice-President Mike Pence seated behind the President on the dais of the House. It was his first since the opposition Democrats

wrested back control of the House in midterm elections last November.

Mr Trump, interrupted by frequent applause and occasional chants of "USA!" from Republicans, stressed his achievements, including a vigorous economy and record employment. And he challenged Congress to rise above partisanship to craft a stronger and even more prosperous America.

The President doubled down on negotiating new trade deals, saying: "To build on our incredible economic success, one priority is paramount – reversing decades of

calamitous trade policies.”

Markets are anxiously watching talks with China, hoping a deal will be reached before a March 1 deadline to further raise tariffs on China unless Beijing makes key concessions.

“We are now making it clear to China that after years of targeting our industries, and stealing our intellectual property, the theft of American jobs and wealth has come to an end,” Mr Trump said.

"I have great respect for President Xi (Jinping), and we are now working on a new trade deal with China. But it must include real, structural change to end unfair trade practices, reduce our chronic trade deficit and protect American jobs."

The site of the meeting with Mr. Kim was not mentioned, but the US is widely reported to favour the seaside city of Da Nang. South Korea's presidential office yesterday welcomed the announcement with spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom saying: "We hope that Vietnam will be a great place for the US and North Korea to make new history."

North Korea has refrained from testing missiles or nuclear devices since Mr Kim and Mr Trump met at a summit in Singapore last June. Pyongyang has also returned the remains of many Americans killed in the Korean War.

But official talks on denuclearisation have not made progress and official rhetoric has been at odds.

US director of national intelligence Dan Coats told lawmakers last week that "North Korea will seek to retain its WMD (weapons of mass destruction) capabilities, and is unlikely to completely give up its nuclear weapons and production capabilities."

While noting that US intelligence had observed “some activity that is inconsistent with full denuclearisation”, he acknowledged that North Korea had “halted its provocative behaviour”.

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SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A8&9,
OPINION A21

Singapore will feel the effects of a slowing global economy and ongoing trade tensions between the United States and China, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, as he urged Singaporeans to keep on upgrading themselves.

Speaking after a visit to workers at ground-handling and catering firm Sats at Changi Airport on Tuesday morning, the first day of Chinese New Year, he said that growth this year "may be not as vibrant as before but we work hard; even if this year is slower, the year after that we can make it better".

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat, during a separate visit to PSA's Pasir Panjang Terminal to join workers on duty for celebrations, said the upcoming Budget will include a focus on ensuring that industries continue to transform and create good jobs for workers and enable them to "learn new skills to upgrade".

Chinese New Year festivities continued yesterday with an Istana open house and the River Hongbao event.



National Taiwan University of Arts dancers performing an item called In The Cool Breeze at the River Hongbao yesterday. An Istana open house, which drew more than 23,000 visitors, added to the Chinese New Year festivities. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) has been named the central bank of the year by a London-based journal.

Yesterday's announcement by the journal Central Banking noted that MAS has an "enviable" track record of monetary and financial stability and stands out for its pioneering fintech efforts. At the same time, it implements coherent financial system oversight.

The MAS was also praised for taking action against those linked to the alleged theft of funds from Malaysian state-owned development fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad.

SEE BUSINESS C1

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10 must-reads for today

1 Post-flood cleanup

Residents of Australia's flood-hit north-east returned home yesterday to begin a massive cleanup after almost two weeks of heavy rain as the wild weather moved south to inundate more towns. Communities remained cut off and thousands were without power in the state of Queensland after some areas received a year's worth of rainfall in just a week. **WORLD A19**



Residents clearing mud off their driveway in Hermit Park, Townsville, in Queensland after days of torrential rain caused massive floods. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

2 Second Trump-Kim Summit

US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un are set to meet in Vietnam from Feb 27 to 28, the American leader told Congress in his second State of the Union address. Mr Trump's speech was frequently interrupted by applause and chants of "USA!" as he stressed his achievements, including a vigorous economy and record employment. **TOP OF THE NEWS A1**

3 Vital to keep upgrading: PM

Global headwinds could see the Singapore economy growing between 1.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent this year, after it grew 3.3 per cent last year. There will be challenges ahead, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who added that it is important to "keep on upgrading ourselves and improving lives for our workers". **TOP OF THE NEWS A4**

4 Jokowi jolts poll race

Indonesia's election race has been jolted by accusations from President Joko Widodo that his opponent is using "Russian propaganda" as an attack strategy. The claim drew a sharp rebuttal from his sole rival, Mr Prabowo Subianto, as well as the Russian Embassy. **WORLD A10**

5 Concerns about SMC fine

Last month, Dr Lim Lian Arn was fined \$100,000 by the Singapore Medical Council for not informing his patient of possible side effects of an injection. One concern based on the penalty is its impact on how doctors practise medicine after this, says senior health correspondent Salma Khalik (below). **OPINION A20**



6 Digital literacy for seniors

The People's Action Party Seniors Group is calling for digital literacy courses to be introduced for seniors to tap freelancing job opportunities. There are about 300 delivery riders aged 60 and above who ride motorcycles or e-scooters to deliver food, but even more want and need to supplement their income, the group said. **HOME B2**

7 Popiah King's son had stroke

Singaporean businessman Ben Goi, who was due to return from Malaysia on Sunday afternoon, suffered an intense headache on Saturday night before dying of a stroke that led to a brain haemorrhage a few hours later. Mr Goi, 43, was Popiah King Sam Goi's youngest of four children. **HOME B3**

8 Tech sector wary of 'chip dip'

Warnings about a sales slowdown this year have come in recent weeks from the big computer chip suppliers, including Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Micron Technology and Western Digital. It is an abrupt reversal, coming on the heels of stellar results last year for the business that gave Silicon Valley its name. **BUSINESS C3**

9 From novice to keen biker

A year ago, Tania Murphy could not even balance herself well on a bike. But after joining OCBC Cycle's learn-to-ride programme Project Training Wheels, the 31-year-old is hooked and now cycles up to 90km every weekend. **SPORT C5**

10 Growing up with Lego Movie

The sequel to the commercial hit The Lego Movie displays a more nuanced outlook on life. The makers of The Lego Movie 2 (below) say the bigger message is about the need to grow up and learn to get on with others – no matter how old one is. **LIFE D4**



PHOTO: WARNER BROS

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VIDEO

Noodle legacy

Meet Madam Leong Yuet Meng, the 90-year-old hawker and founder of Nam Seng Noodles & Fried Rice at Far East Square. Her sons say it is time for their mother to take it easy. <http://str.sg/noodlestall>

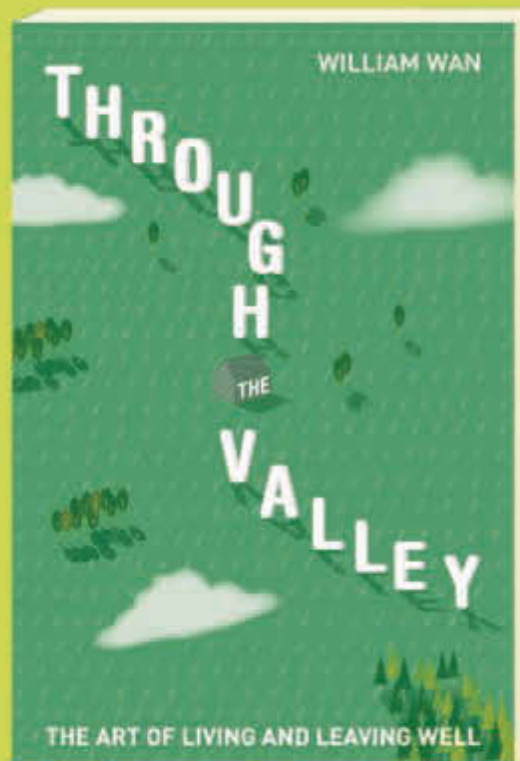


VIDEO

Boracay reborn

After a massive cleanup, the Philippines' crown jewel resort island reopened in late October. What are the reactions to the changes? ST visits the holiday isle to find out. <http://str.sg/boracayisle>

Celebrate the Art of Living and Leaving Well



The author, Dr William Wan, General Secretary of Singapore Kindness Movement, will share his unique insights on how people can age gracefully at his book launch.

TIME
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In conjunction with the launch, the public is invited to visit the Dialogue with Time – Embrace Ageing Exhibition at the Science Centre Singapore.

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7 nabbed after kidnapped S'porean is released in Johor

Vegetable trader freed after family pays \$331,000 ransom

JOHOR BARU • Malaysian police have arrested seven men believed to be involved in the kidnapping of a Singapore vegetable trader in Gelang Patah in southern Johor.

The men were arrested after his family paid a ransom of RM1 million (\$331,000) to the kidnappers, The Malaysian Insight news site reported on Tuesday, quoting Johor police chief Mohd Khalil Mohd Kader.

The businessman, who is in his 50s, was allegedly kidnapped on Jan 27. He was not named.

The businessman, who is in his 50s, was allegedly kidnapped on Jan 27. The family paid the ransom on Jan 31 and he was released a day later, the report said.

The family paid the ransom on Jan 31 and he was released a day later, the report said.

Police recovered several weapons and part of the ransom money in the operation to nab the suspects, The Malaysian Insight said.

A source told the news site: "The police operation to trace the sus-

pects started as soon as word was received that the victim was already free and safe."

The suspects were rounded up in police operations last Friday and Saturday by Johor police and a special unit from police headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

The source said the men are being investigated under Section 3 of the Kidnapping Act 1961 and the Firearms Act 1960.

Contacted yesterday, Johor Baru police confirmed the incident but did not divulge more information.

It will be holding a news conference today to give more details of the kidnapping.

Gelang Patah is a small township that is located close to the Johor side of the Second Link bridge at Tuas, beside the Iskandar Puteri township, formerly known as Nusantara.

Lucy the giraffe dies while giving birth at Singapore Zoo

Lucy the giraffe – a much-loved resident of Singapore Zoo – died while giving birth on Tuesday evening.

Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS), which manages the zoo, said in a Facebook post on Monday that 14-year-old Lucy had gone into labour over the weekend and that things did not go smoothly.

A day later, Lucy's care team decided to sedate her and extract the foetus, a procedure WRS described as "complex and fraught with risks".

WRS said Lucy had been in labour for more than 48 hours but was unable to deliver the calf.

The zoo's veterinarians determined that the calf's chance of survival was "near zero".

As other dangers would arise for Lucy if the calf could not be expelled, "our vets made the decision to extract the foetus and focus on saving Lucy. Unfortunately, Lucy suffered a cardiac arrest during the procedure". The calf also "did not make it".

Lucy was confirmed to be pregnant with her first calf in April last year. A giraffe's gestation takes

about 15 months and Lucy had been expected to give birth in January.

Originally from The Tisch Family Zoological Gardens in Israel, Lucy was brought to Singapore by ship on a 16-day voyage in 2005 together with another female giraffe named Roni, who died in April 2017.

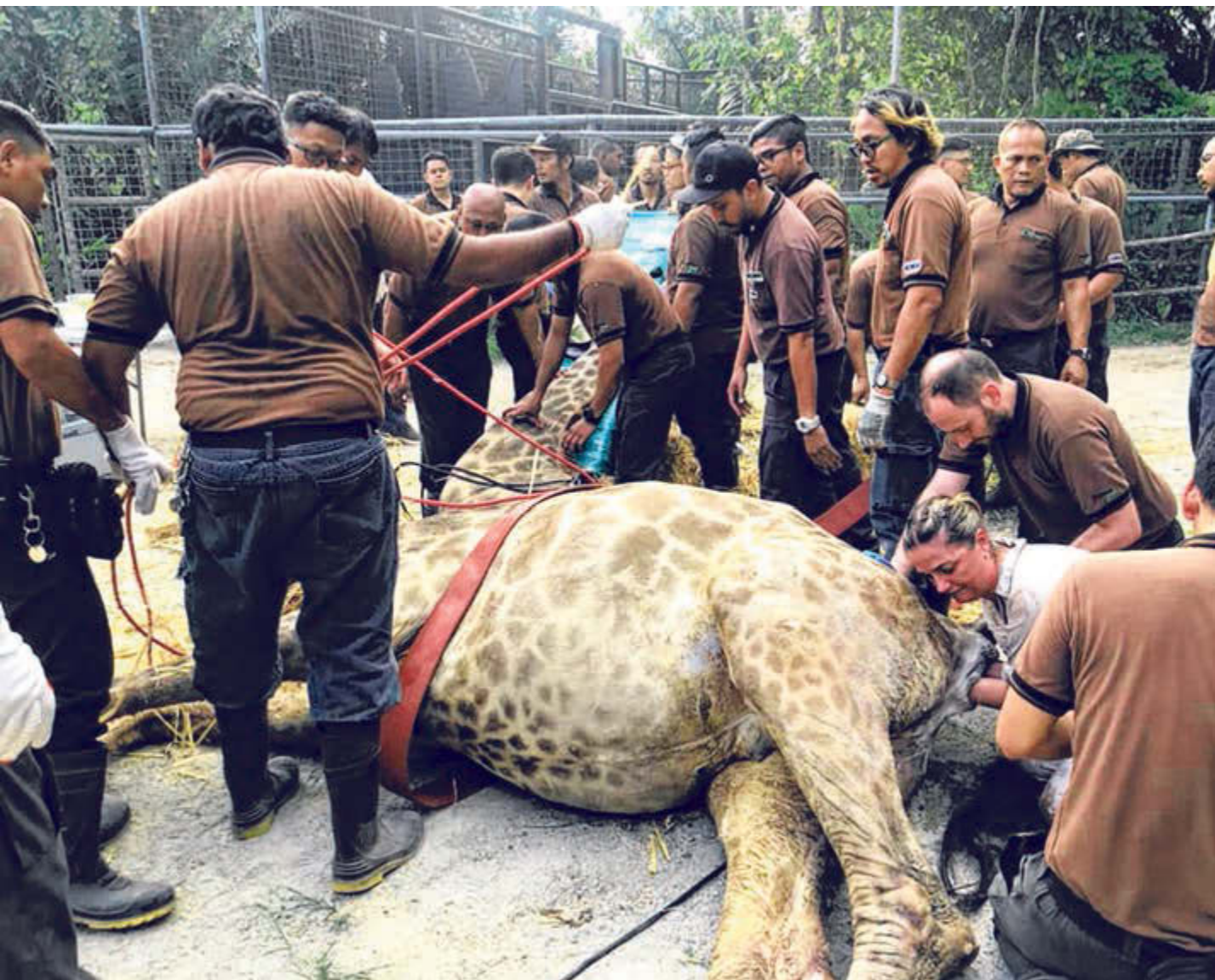
She had shared her enclosure with the zoo's two remaining giraffes, Lucy's 14-year-old mate Marco, who was previously known as Growie, and Jubilee, a male giraffe born in 2015 to Marco and Roni.

WRS said in its post: "All of us at WRS would like to show our appreciation and support for Lucy's care team for their dedication, love and care they provided to Lucy. Our hearts are with them during this hard time."

Last year, the zoo also lost another of its beloved animals, Inuka, Singapore's last polar bear.

Inuka, who was 27, was put down on humane grounds on April 25 after his health deteriorated.

Rei Kurohi and Bridget Tan



Lucy the giraffe went into cardiac arrest during the process of extracting the foetus from her after she had been in labour for more than 48 hours and was unable to deliver.

PHOTO: WILDLIFE RESERVES SINGAPORE/FACEBOOK



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Vital to keep upgrading amid slowing global economy: PM

Challenges ahead, so it's important to keep on improving lives for workers, he says

Karamjit Kaur
Senior Aviation Correspondent

A slowing global economy and ongoing trade tensions between the United States and China will have an impact on Singapore, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said.

Growth this year may not be as strong, he told reporters on Tuesday, after visiting workers at ground-handling and catering firm Sats at Changi Airport.

"We will have challenges ahead," PM Lee said, noting that it is important to "keep on upgrading ourselves and improving lives for our workers".

"Last year was good growth, the year before was also good growth. This year I think we will continue to grow. It may be not as vibrant as before but we work hard; even if this year is slower, the year after that we can make it better," he said.

The Singapore economy grew 3.3 per cent last year, just below the 3.5

per cent in 2017. But headwinds mean it is expected to grow by between 1.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent this year.

During PM Lee's visit to Sats on the morning of the first day of the Chinese New Year, he was briefed on the company's efforts to innovate and stay ahead of the competition.

He noted that global and regional developments will also affect Singapore's position as an air hub.

"The air hub is a very important part of our economy... In the long term, I expect that business will still grow because the region in the long term will continue... picking up and people are travelling," he said.

"We make sure that we are competitive, (and) they will fly through Singapore."

Asked about ongoing airspace issues between Singapore and Malaysia, he said: "We will discuss with them and we will work very hard to make sure that we enable Changi to continue to be able to operate smoothly, and the Malaysians



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Mrs Lee and NTUC president Mary Liew (in orange) having a lohei session with workers, union leaders and management staff at ground-handling and catering firm Sats at Changi Airport on Tuesday, the first day of the Chinese New Year. ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

also to have their airports operating smoothly, and traffic can flow throughout the region."

Singapore and Malaysia are in talks about a new aircraft landing system that Singapore proposes to have at Seletar Airport, as well as airspace over Pasir Gudang in Johor, which Singapore has been managing for Malaysia since 1974.

PM Lee was accompanied on Tuesday by Mrs Lee, National Trades Union Congress president Mary Liew, its secretary-general Ng Chee Meng, its central committee

members as well as union leaders from Air-Transport Executive Staff Union and Singapore Airport Terminal Services Workers' Union.

In total, they met about 150 staff in the various kitchens and tray assembly area, as well as the innovation and product development team.

Mr Lee gave out red packets and mandarin oranges, as well as gifts provided by Mrs Lee.

The visit ended with a traditional lohei session with workers, union leaders and management staff.

PM Lee, who was on his first visit

to Sats, said: "They (Sats) do a very important, quiet job, making sure that we keep our air hub humming and that passengers coming in and out of Singapore can get good meals on aeroplanes."

"Large numbers of people are working here; I think today there are 500 people on duty, preparing meals, getting things packed, logistics sorted. I was very happy to have a chance to say hello to them, wish them *xin nian kuai le* (Happy New Year), and also wish them a very good year ahead and thank them

for their hard work."

Sats prepares about 90,000 in-flight meals daily.

Before the Sats visit, Mr Ng, the labour chief, was at Changi Airport to greet cabbies and thank them for providing transport services to Singaporeans during the festive period.

He was with Parliament Speaker Tan Chuan-Jin and about 50 leaders from the National Taxi Association. Over 1,000 taxi drivers received gift bags prepared by NTA.

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Budget will include help for industries to continue to transform

Rahimah Rashith

The upcoming Budget will include a focus on keeping Singapore safe and secure and ensuring its industries can continue to transform and create good jobs for workers, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said on Tuesday.

This includes "enabling our workers to learn new skills to upgrade, in particular enabling our companies to build deep capabilities so that they can stand to be more competitive in the coming years", he said.

"At the same time, we have to look after the environment and quality of life in Singapore. So it is quite a comprehensive agenda," Mr Heng added.

In his Budget speech on Feb 18, Mr Heng will also be providing details of the Merdeka Generation Package and how Singapore is working to keep the elderly active and healthy, he said.

He was speaking to reporters on the first day of the Chinese New Year at PSA's Pasir Panjang Terminal, where he joined workers on duty for celebrations.

With Mr Heng were Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry Koh Poh Koon who is also NTUC deputy secretary-general, as well as Senior Minister of State for Transport and Health Lam Pin Min, and union leaders. They visited 1,000

workers who continued to be on duty at the port, which operates round the clock.

Mr Heng added that he remains upbeat about the Republic's prospects this year.

"The global economic environment is more uncertain and we can expect some slowdown, but we must continue our transformation and remain optimistic that we will continue to make good progress," he said. "We have to look not just over one or two quarters, but over how we can make an effort in transforming our economy," he said, and this includes continuing to have good long-term growth on the jobs front.

He also highlighted PSA's efforts in restructuring as a result of its workers' dedication and contributions. "PSA had excellent results last year, they had the best results so far in terms of volume of containers they handle both in Singapore and worldwide," he said. "A lot of this is due to the tremendous hard work and good work of our workers."

Last year, PSA handled a record 81 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of cargo in its port projects in Singapore and around the world. This was up by 9.1 per cent from 2017.

"I had a very good tour of the operations in the PSA to look at how PSA itself is transforming. With new technologies, new trade rules, PSA had to continue to upgrade and restructure its operation to form new partnerships," he said.

"I'm very happy to see the work that's going on, that we have a very strong leadership team in PSA, a very good relationship with our workers and it's this strong tripartite relationship that will see us growing our container volume, and strengthen our position as a sea hub," Mr Heng added.

"At the same time, all over Singapore, we have many, many agencies dinner at her grandmother-in-law's house.

The couple, who have been married for two years, visited Mount Alvernia Hospital at about 10.30pm, thinking they could get some medication before heading home. "We came to the hospital thinking that it was just a routine check but, in the end, I was already 5cm dilated," said Ms Wong, a mechanical engineer.

After 1½ hours of labour, Ethan was delivered naturally as the clock struck midnight. He weighed 3.27kg. Ms Wong said she had had minor



9.1%

Increase in amount of cargo PSA handled in its port projects in Singapore and around the world last year from 2017.

and companies that are working, whether at the airport, seaport, in our land transport system, and key institutions like our hospitals and the police and SAF (Singapore Armed Forces) – even as we enjoy our holiday. This is something which I hope all of us will appreciate," he said.

Several other ministers were also out to thank workers on Tuesday.

They included Health Minister Gan Kim Yong who visited healthcare workers and patients at Changi General Hospital and St Andrew's Community Hospital and expressed his appreciation to those keeping essential healthcare services running.

Manpower Minister Josephine Teo, who oversees population matters, also visited KK Women's and Children's Hospital to thank staff on duty and meet new mothers.

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New portal for students eyeing China internships

An internship programme to support Singapore students pursuing opportunities in China will be implemented this year.

Business China will set up an online portal to publish a list of firms with internships available in both countries.

"Singaporean and Chinese youth can use this platform to seek out internship opportunities. Conventionally, internship and corporate attachment opportunities were available only through schools. Through our Business China Internship Programme, the youth can secure internships directly via the portal," said Mr Lee Yi Shyan, chairman of Business China, on Tuesday.

The Business China Internship Programme, announced last year, aims to encourage young people in Singapore and China to take part in internships in each other's country with the aim of "enhancing their mutual understanding and broadening our network of Singapore-China-savvy talents".

Mr Lee was at a Chinese New Year celebration hosted by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) and Business China that was attended by close to 600 foreign diplomats, senior government officials, business leaders and trade association members.

They included Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing, Education Minister Ong Ye Kung and Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information, and Culture, Community and Youth Sim Ann.

Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan was the guest of honour. In his speech, he emphasised the positive Singapore-China relations nurtured over the years. He praised organisations like the SCCCI and Business China that have helped Singapore "to engage the major powers while remaining helpful, reliable and neutral to all".

"Over the years, we have built up extensive trade and economic links. We are China's largest foreign investor, and China is our largest trading partner. Thousands of Chinese companies are in Singapore. They are attracted by our positive business environment and our connections with Asean countries to use us as a launchpad for the region," he said.

Rahimah Rashith

Year of Pig's first baby a surprise for parents

Ng Huiwen

Little Ethan Poon gave his parents a Chinese New Year surprise when he made his appearance at the stroke of midnight on Tuesday, making him the first baby here to be born in the Year of the Pig.

First-time parents Poon Yee Siang, 30, and Wong Ee Wen, 28, had been expecting their newborn to arrive a month later on March 3, but Ms Wong began experiencing painful contractions after a reunion

dinner at her grandmother-in-law's house.

The couple, who have been married for two years, visited Mount Alvernia Hospital at about 10.30pm, thinking they could get some medication before heading home. "We came to the hospital thinking that it was just a routine check but, in the end, I was already 5cm dilated," said Ms Wong, a mechanical engineer.

After 1½ hours of labour, Ethan was delivered naturally as the clock struck midnight. He weighed 3.27kg. Ms Wong said she had had minor



Mr Poon Yee Siang and his wife Wong Ee Wen with their baby boy Ethan, who was born at midnight on Tuesday. The first-time parents were expecting him to arrive a month later on March 3. PHOTO: MOUNT ALVERNIA HOSPITAL

contractions for about 1½ days and the doctor had advised her to monitor the situation and go for a check if necessary.

During the reunion dinner on Chinese New Year's Eve, she had some painful contractions but these were bearable.

It was only after the couple returned home that her pain intensified and they decided to head to the hospital, she added.

Little Ethan is a baby with several firsts. He is not only the first child of Mr Poon, who is a civil engineer, and his wife, but he is also the first grandson and first great-grandson of Mr Poon's family.

Upon hearing the good news, Mr Poon's parents were so excited that they rushed to the hospital in the morning, the couple said.

Mr Poon met his wife when they were undergraduates at the National University of Singapore and they got married after graduation.

They said they had not planned for Ethan as they wanted to "let nature take its course".

Now, they are hoping to have another child in about two years' time. Mount Alvernia's chief executive James Lam said: "We are very happy for Mr and Mrs Poon. I'm sure Mr Poon's family is especially delighted with this new bundle of joy."

Dr Lam, who presented the new parents with a Chinese New Year baby hamper, said: "We wish Ethan health and happiness always. We also wish all babies good health and a blessed journey in life."

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Madam Goh Oh Keing (centre), 94, enjoying a reunion lunch treat on Monday. With her are Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Joan Pereira and Mr Raymond Goh, managing director of Tong Bee Construction and one of the sponsors of the event.

ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG



Reunion lunch treat for seniors who live alone

It was a meal to remember for Madam Goh Oh Keing, 94, who was among 130 elderly residents who live alone, at a Chinese New Year Eve reunion lunch organised by the Henderson-Dawson Citizens Consultative Committee.

With her were Mr Raymond Goh, managing director of Tong Bee Con-

struction and one of the sponsors of the event, and Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Joan Pereira.

Madam Goh, who gets around in a wheelchair and has no living relatives, said it was "good to see everyone coming together".

The reunion lunch was coordinated by a group of 30 volunteers,

including students from Eunoia and St Andrew's junior colleges and members of the American Women's Association (AWA).

Ms Claire Fournier of the AWA said the volunteers wanted to help even though they did not speak the same language as the elderly.

Ms Pereira said the volunteers and the elderly "required no particular language to interact because they spoke the language of love".

Chinese New Year is about family togetherness, she said, adding that it was vital to provide this familial feeling for the lonely elderly.

Jev Akshay Jeevan

Medallions launched to mark 150th year of Istana

They depict icons such as Istana's centre gate and Sri Temasek

Zhaki Abdullah

A set of five souvenir medallions was launched yesterday to mark the 150th anniversary of the Istana.

The series – released by the President's official residence in conjunction with the Singapore Mint – includes five different designs.

They depict monuments such as the 88-year-old centre gate of the Istana, and the Sri Temasek building, which is the 19th-century bungalow that serves as the official residence of the Prime Minister.

Another of the silver medallions, in the shape of the main Istana building, is unique in that it is the only medallion so far to feature the Presidential Crest, according to Singapore Mint director David Yip.

The other two medallions depict the changing of guards parade and children playing on the lawn of the Istana during an open house.

Also included with the series is a Nets FlashPay card, showing the front view of the main Istana building.

President Halimah Yacob launched the souvenirs yesterday, during the Istana open house held in conjunction with the second day of Chinese New Year.

"The designs of the series create a unique opportunity for Singaporeans to know more about the history and heritage of the Istana," she said, noting that proceeds will go to the President's Challenge, the annual community outreach and fund-raising campaign.

President Halimah added that she hoped to work with voluntary welfare organisations for future souvenirs, to showcase the work of their beneficiaries.

A second series of medallions featuring the flora and fauna of the Istana will be launched in July.

The Istana welcomed more than 23,000 people yesterday.

Visitors were treated to a variety of performances, including a lion dance by the Yi Wei Athletic Association and a wushu performance by the Metta School.

While some tried their hand at traditional Chinese calligraphy, others enjoyed the biodiversity of the Istana's grounds on a guided walk conducted by the National Parks Board. Meanwhile, volunteers from the National Heritage Board took visitors on tours of the main building, where they got to see selected function rooms and collections of state gifts presented to the President and the Prime Minister.

Built in 1869 as Government House, the Istana served as the residence of 21 governors during the colonial period before Singapore's independence.

On Oct 6, it will open to the public at night for the first time to mark its 150th anniversary.

As part of the celebrations, there will be a travelling exhibition featuring the Istana's history and heritage later this year, while a series of new books covering the history, architecture and wildlife of the Istana grounds will also be launched.

The medallions are available in limited quantities at Singapore Mint retail shops from today, with prices ranging from \$40 to \$220 per medallion. They can also be pre-ordered at The Singapore Mint's website.

azhaki@sph.com.sg



A silver medallion, in the shape of the main Istana building, alongside two medallions depicting the changing of guards parade and children playing on the lawn of the Istana during an open house. ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

Swirl of fun for underprivileged at River Hongbao



Children from underprivileged families enjoy a swirling ride on what is believed to be the first double-storey carousel in Singapore at the annual River Hongbao festival. Games and ride provider JKids Amusement sponsored \$30,000 worth of games cards for children, some of whom are beneficiaries of the Jurong Central student assistance scheme, so that they would be able to have fun going on carousel, bumper car or Ferris wheel rides, among others. Mr Ang Wei Neng, chairman of River Hongbao 2019 and an MP for Jurong GRC, said the organising committee's aim is to broaden the River Hongbao visitorship so that those who would not normally be able to, or would not think of visiting the event, would be included in the festivities. Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing was the guest of honour yesterday, when more than 150,000 people visited The Float @ Marina Bay. That brought the total number of visitors to the River Hongbao celebration in its first four days to 650,000. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

Migrant workers ease loneliness with dumpling party

Janice Tai

Chinese migrant worker Wang Yong spent the first day of Chinese New Year alone in his dormitory room in Taman Jurong.

Though the 42-year-old had several invitations from friends who welcomed him to visit their homes, he was homesick and preferred to spend most of the day video-calling his family back in Jilin, north-east China.

Every year, his family there celebrates the new year by making and eating jiaozi (dumplings), setting off firecrackers and catching the annual Spring Festival Gala show on television.

"My family usually eats dumplings on the eve, first day and second day of the new year," said Mr Wang Yong, who is a metal worker in a manufacturing firm.

Yesterday, he and 150 other Chinese migrant workers gathered to eat dumplings together and celebrate the Chinese New Year.

A non-profit organisation for migrant workers, Labour Arty, and a community of migrant Chinese in Singapore co-organised the dumpling party for Chinese foreigners who were not returning home for the new year.

"We hope that there can be a festive, homely atmosphere even for

those who cannot see their family this holiday due to financial or employment constraints," said Mr Ou Ningfei, 29, one of the founders of Labour Arty.

The dumpling party has been an annual affair for the past seven years, though the event has grown in size in recent years with the attendance tripling to 150 from when it started.

This year, more than 2,000 dumplings were prepared.

When the event was first held, the migrant workers would pitch in to help make the dumplings from scratch and cook and eat them on the spot.

This year, however, due to the large volume of dumplings, volunteers prepared them in their homes or dormitories and took them to Jurong Christian Church, where the event was held.

Large cauldrons of boiling water were laid out in its walkway and steaming plates of dumplings were then served to the migrant workers, who came from nearby dormitories.

They included a Chinese chef who volunteered to help oversee the kitchen and logistics for the day.

Labour Arty's vision is to "move from awareness to appreciation of migrant communities" in Singapore by using arts and cul-



SOME RELIEF

I can't afford to fly back home this New Year but the party helps to ease the loneliness and create some atmosphere.



MR WANG YONG, who hails from the north-eastern part of China.

"Having dumplings for Chinese New Year is like what yusheng (raw fish salad) is for Singaporeans. We want them to have a chance to celebrate the new year in a way that is recognisable for almost everyone from China," said Mr Ou, a civil servant.

For Mr Wang, dumplings evoke special memories. His province is known for a variety of pork dumplings to which pickled vegetables are added.

"My wife can easily make 50 to 60 dumplings in 20 minutes," said Mr Wang, who has two teenage children.

"I can't afford to fly back home this New Year but the party helps to ease the loneliness and create some atmosphere."

jantai@sph.com.sg

Chinese migrant worker Wang Yong (left) and fellow Chinese national Dai Yan Zhao, 47, preparing to serve traditional dumplings for over 150 attendees at a Chinese New Year party yesterday. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Children need more support to transition to P1: Researchers

NIE guide for teachers, parents stresses more emotional backing and fewer worksheets

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

Children need more emotional support and fewer worksheets and spelling tests when they move from pre-school to primary school, say researchers.

Their advice is contained in a new guide from the National Institute of Education (NIE) for parents and teachers to make the tricky transition to Primary 1 easier.

Over half of the 3,000 copies of the guide, which has been written without the usual academic jargon, have been distributed to pre-schools and educators. The aim is to make it available online within two months.

Dr Hanin Hussain, who led the team, said scientific research has shown that how children manage their emotions and learn vital skills like self-confidence are extremely important in their early years.

This kind of development cannot be separate from other sorts of abilities, such as cognitive skills.

The NIE project, which started in 2015, found in a survey that parents were concerned about the emotional development of their children. The poll sought the views of 260 parents and teachers and 104 children who were either in the second year of kindergarten or Primary 1.

The adults were asked to rate how important certain factors related to their children's transition to primary school were to them.

Many noted that it was important for their children to feel safe and secure in school, to have friends and to be able to follow the school routines.

They also considered aspects like personal hygiene and being happy to go to school as most important, more so than being able to recognise letters or follow directions.

Dr Hanin, who is from NIE's Early Childhood and Special Needs Education group, said: "Sometimes we think about Singaporean parents being super kiasu (scared of losing out) about academics."

But a lot of them are actually more concerned about children's adjustment to school, she added.

Dr Hanin, 51, who has been a primary and pre-school teacher, said transition can be a stressful process as children adapt to changes and find themselves in a larger school environment with longer hours, so they do not need extra pressure.

The resource guide, which was completed last year, was funded by the Henry David Hochstadt Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund, which is administered by NIE.

Dr Hanin said: "We want to challenge people to think about how doing more and more worksheets can actually come at a cost."

"(Children) might lose their love for learning... They can experience unhealthy stress and their holistic development can suffer."

The booklet suggests ways for primary schools and pre-schools to co-operate to support children, for instance, by organising activities and visits, and sharing details about each other's curricula and assessment.

Dr Hanin added that there are other ways that parents can help kids enjoy school, such as playing games and reading with them and providing a variety of experiences.

"I hope that adults can listen to children's voices, not just what they say but observing them and paying attention to what they do, how they behave, how they act," she said.

"It's not just about what we want them to achieve... (but what) they're interested in, and how they feel about something."

ateng@sph.com.sg



Dr Hanin Hussain with a new guide from the National Institute of Education for parents and teachers, which aims to make the tricky transition to Primary 1 easier. Children may lose their love for learning and experience unhealthy stress if they are given more and more worksheets to do, says Dr Hanin. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO



Students wearing masks as heavy air pollution continues to affect Bangkok. A rattled Thai government is stepping up oversight of factories. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Bangkok running out of air purifiers as toxic smog persists

BANGKOK • Every time Bangkok fruit seller Veerachai Roop-suwanakul tries to buy an air purifier, he gets the same response: "Out of stock."

"We never imagined the air could get so bad," said Mr Veerachai, who now wears a face mask to filter out dust. "We can't find a purifier in shops or online."

The Thai capital is grappling with a second year of spiking seasonal air pollution, prompting people to snap up so many filters and masks that supplies are dwindling.

Residents fear a long battle lies ahead to keep the toxic smog at bay, signalling growing opportunities for purifier makers such as Sharp or mask manufacturer 3M in the city of roughly 10 million people.

"As you can see from our websites and stores, our air purifiers are all sold out," said Mr Yol Phokasub, president of Central Group, which owns Thailand's top developer of shopping malls. Other local retailers, such as Berli Jucker and Home Product Centre, are also unable to keep up with demand.

Last week, the Thai authorities shut hundreds of schools after a sharp drop in air quality. Bangkok at one point had the fourth-worst smog globally among major cities, based on an index compiled by monitoring start-up IQAir AirVisual.

While the pollution problem is not as bad as in places like New Delhi, haze awareness has spread

rapidly among Bangkok's residents this year.

More than two million people are tracking Bangkok on the IQAir AirVisual app, compared with about 80,000 in the Indian capital.

"The surge of interest from Thailand started around Jan 21," the start-up's marketing manager Kelsey Duska said. "Since then, Thailand has been the country generating the most interest in terms of app usage and sales of air quality monitors."

A rattled Thai military government is stepping up oversight of the worst polluters, such as factories.

Weather patterns, vehicle fumes, construction dust and the burning of both trash and crops have also been blamed for the haze.

"Manufacturers are going to be under pressure to do better on pollution," Federation of Thai Industries executive director Chayo Trangadis-aikul said. "Firms offering technology for environmental upgrades may see huge opportunities."

While some businesses may benefit from demand for products that fight smog, the metropolis as a whole is at risk of being the big loser.

Bangkok is the world's most-visited city and relies on tourism for economic growth, but the haze may repel visitors. Tourism has not been affected yet, but air pollution could have some impact if the problem drags on, the Bank of Thailand said last week. BLOOMBERG

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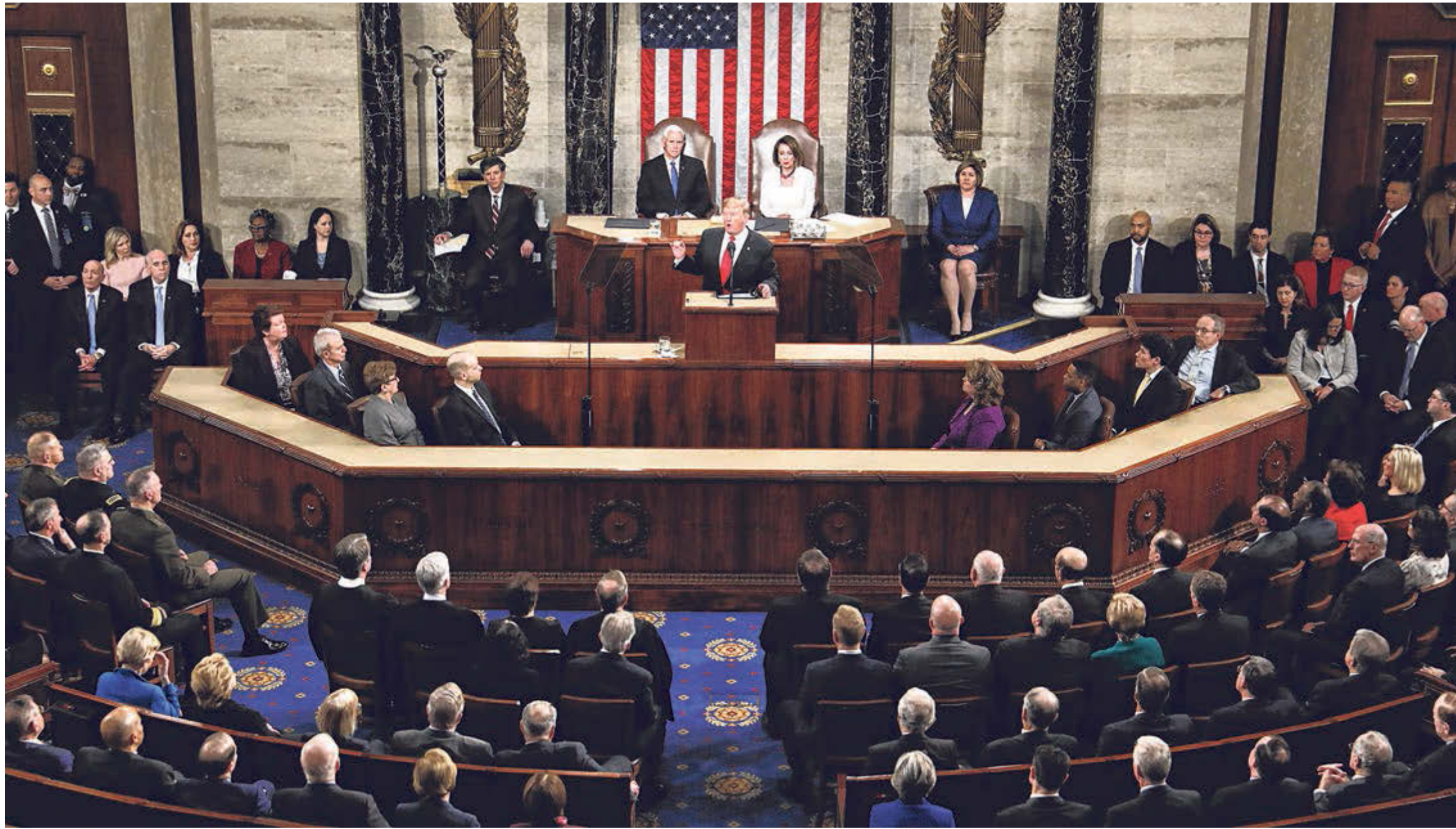
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Trump's State of the Union address

US President Donald Trump delivering his second State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress at the US Capitol in Washington on Tuesday. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG



Trump paints bold vision of a stronger America

But he takes jabs at Democrats even as he urges bipartisanship

Nirmal Ghosh
US Bureau Chief
In New York

In a rousing second State of the Union address to a deeply divided Congress, President Donald Trump painted a bold, optimistic vision of a stronger, prosperous America, urging bipartisanship in key legislation and reform to make it happen.

But he mixed conciliatory appeals with jabs at the opposition Democratic Party, saying "an economic miracle is taking place in the United States - and the only thing that can stop it are foolish wars, politics, or ridiculous partisan investigations."

"If there is going to be peace and legislation, there cannot be war and investigation. It just doesn't work that way," he said.

"We must be united at home to de-

feat our adversaries abroad."

And in strong remarks aimed at socialist elements of the Democratic Party like Senator Bernie Sanders and New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, he said: "We are born free, and we will stay free. Tonight, we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country."

His agenda was an agenda for the American people, he insisted. "In the 20th century, America saved freedom, transformed science, and redefined the middle class standard of living for the entire world to see," he said.

"Now, we must step boldly and bravely into the next chapter of this Great American Adventure, and we must create a new standard of living for the 21st century."

"Together, we can break decades of political stalemate... bridge old divisions, heal old wounds, build new coalitions, forge new solutions, and unlock the extraordinary promise of America's future," he urged.

"The decision is ours to make," he said. "We must choose between

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We have a moral duty to create an immigration system that protects the lives and jobs of our citizens. Tonight, I am asking you to defend our very dangerous southern border out of love and devotion to our fellow citizens and to our country.

“

U.S. PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP making another pitch for a southern border wall.

greatness or gridlock, results or resistance, vision or vengeance, incredible progress or pointless destruction. Tonight, I ask you to choose greatness."

The President touted his adminis-

tration's "historic" achievements - including reversing "calamitous trade deals"; an energy revolution which had made the US the No. 1 producer of oil and natural gas in the world; a vigorous economy; and a military that is "the most powerful army on earth".

He drew bipartisan applause for successful prison reform legislation, and got whoops even from Democratic members when he lauded the record number of women in the House.

But the divisive issue of immigration loomed large, with the President pitching again for a wall on the southern border.

Democrats maintain building the wall will be ineffective and a waste of money. The issue of the wall has slammed the brakes on immigration system reform, which even many Trump critics say is badly needed.

"We have a moral duty to create an immigration system that protects the lives and jobs of our citizens," Mr Trump said.

"Tonight, I am asking you to defend our very dangerous southern

border out of love and devotion to our fellow citizens and to our country."

"Walls work and walls save lives," he insisted. "So let's work together, compromise, and reach a deal that will truly make America safe."

Mr Trump did not mention declaring an emergency - one option if he does not get the US\$5.7 billion (S\$7.7 billion) he is demanding for the wall by Feb 15, after which there will be another federal government shutdown until the deadlock is broken.

The last such shutdown that ended last month, lasted a record 35 days. Analysts said declaring an emergency now seems the more likely route for the President.

Mr Trump devoted much time to foreign policy, denouncing Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, who the US and a number of Latin American and European countries accuse of being an illegitimate leader.

He announced a second summit this month with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, and outlined how he was pushing back against China and Iran, and negotiating a political settlement in Afghanistan which would enable American troops to come home.

Recalling how he had for long maintained that the US should not get involved in "endless wars", he added: "As we make progress in these negotiations, we will be able to reduce our troop presence and focus on counter terrorism."

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News analysis

Trump's vision risks running aground on deep differences



Nirmal Ghosh

US Bureau Chief
In New York

President Donald Trump's call for bipartisanship to further a bold vision for a vibrant, even more prosperous and powerful America, outlined in his second State of the Union speech, has plenty of room for common ground - but is unlikely to weather America's bitter polarisation.

Both parties could find common ground on issues like reducing prices of pharmaceutical drugs,

reforming healthcare and investing in infrastructure. But Mr Trump also doubled down on his pitch for a wall on the southern border.

Much of that undermined the overarching theme of the speech, Dr Jennifer Mercieca, associate professor of communications at Texas A&M University, told The Straits Times.

"On the surface are the goals of liberal democracy, urging bipartisanship and cooperation; but at the same time he undermined those goals with sharp targeted criticism, saying what the Democrats are doing is very unfair," she said.

"Typically when Trump talks about bipartisanship, he wants it on his terms."

The body language was obvious. Behind him as he spoke to the joint session of Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, seated next to Vice-President Mike Pence, mostly

smiled politely and applauded only perfunctorily.

She was enthusiastic during bipartisan moments - for instance, at the mention of Mr Trump's guests, who included a child cancer survivor and a soldier who helped liberate the Dachau concentration camp in World War II.

She stood and applauded enthusiastically at the mention of prison reform legislation - one of the successes of the administration, cited by Mr Trump as an example of bipartisanship.

And she urged all to stand as Mr Trump noted that there are now more women than ever in Congress - which drew unstinting applause across the board.

Those moments were uplifting but short-lived. And Mr Trump's contention that investigations of his administration are detrimental to America drew wide pushback from Democrats.

Mr Joaquin Castro, Democratic Congressman from Texas and a member of the House Intelligence Committee, said: "I think that telegraphed a certain nervousness that he understands the gravity of these investigations, and what they mean to his presidency."

There was a predictable chorus of criticism from the Democratic Party and activist groups to Mr Trump's comments on illegal immigrants - the key rationale for building the wall.

"Year after year, countless Americans are murdered by criminal illegal aliens," he said, acknowledging the survivors of an attack by an illegal immigrant on a family he had invited to the speech.

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law slammed his remarks as promoting "dangerous stereotypes about immigrants seeking refuge and a safe haven in the United States".

Democrat Ilhan Omar, the newly elected Muslim Congresswoman from Minnesota, had her face in her hands as the President spoke about illegal immigrants.

Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York said later: "I had to ask myself: Is this a campaign stop or is this a State of the Union?"

Mr Trump himself supplied part of the answer to the problem of the deep divisions in Congress - and in the country - over key issues.

Invoking his largely blue-collar support base, he said: "No issue better illustrates the divide between America's working class and America's political class than illegal immigration."

"Wealthy politicians and donors push for open borders while living their lives behind walls and gates and guards."

There was predictable praise from Republicans.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said: "It was a great speech. He laid out the robust economy we have. The tax cut that we passed clearly had a positive impact... America has much to be happy about."

"But we've got some problems and the southern border is one of them. The President has pushed for adequate border security and I'm hoping that the Congress will finally give it to him."

A CNN poll after the speech found that 59 per cent of viewers had a very positive reaction, 17 per cent had a somewhat positive reaction and 23 per cent had a negative one. But the results reflect the fact that most of the audience for the State of the Union speech were from the President's party.

Author Aaron Kall, who has edited a book on State of the Union addresses and is director of debate at the University of Michigan, told The Straits Times: "Certainly there were things in there that the Democrats will like. But there is no middle ground on hot-button social issues like immigration and abortion."

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Snippets

Talks on a settlement with Afghan groups stepped up

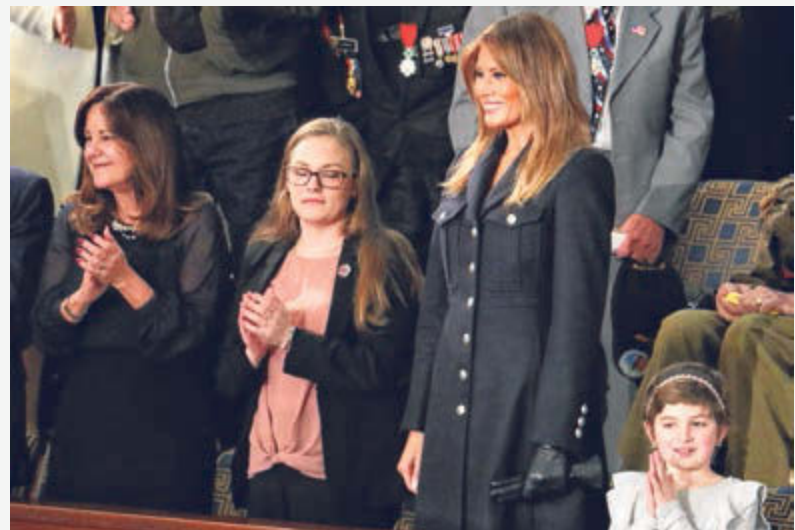
WASHINGTON • United States President Donald Trump said on Tuesday his administration had accelerated negotiations to reach a political settlement in Afghanistan with groups including the Taliban and, as they make progress, the US would be able to reduce its troop presence there.

"Great nations do not fight endless wars," Mr Trump said, adding that US troops had nearly defeated Islamic State in Iraq and Syria militants in Syria and it was time to bring them home. REUTERS

Fresh funds pledged to eradicate Aids

WASHINGTON • The US President, who fired his HIV/Aids advisory council a year ago and has no one working in the White House Office of National Aids Policy, pivoted on Tuesday, pledging to direct fresh money and knowledge to eradicate the epidemic.

Going beyond the promises of any of his predecessors since Aids appeared as a deadly scourge nearly four decades ago, Mr Donald Trump announced a strategy to stop the spread of HIV by 2030, by



United States First Lady Melania Trump (third from left) at the House gallery to hear her husband's speech on Tuesday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Melania returns to public spotlight

WASHINGTON • When Mrs Melania Trump entered the House gallery to watch her husband Donald Trump give the State of the

Union address, the moment marked yet another re-emergence for the First Lady.

The cameras lingered as she waved. Commentators on Twitter remarked on her choice to wear a dark suit, in contrast to the Democratic women who wore white in a nod to suffragettes.

Before the First Lady's turn in the spotlight on Tuesday night, she had been out of the public view for more than five weeks. WASHINGTON POST



Women lawmakers dressed in white at President Donald Trump's State of the Union address on Tuesday in Washington. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Trump's ex-housekeeper a Democrat's guest

WASHINGTON • For more than five years, Ms Victorina Morales made Mr Donald Trump's bed, cleaned his toilet and dusted his trophies as a housekeeper at one of his golf clubs - without legal status to reside in the United States. On Tuesday night, the 46-year-old from Guatemala took her place as a Democratic lawmaker's guest for the

President's State of the Union address to Congress, where she hoped to be a powerful symbol of the undocumented migrants his administration has demonised. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Democrat women show up in white

WASHINGTON • Several dozen Democratic lawmakers dressed in white sat en bloc on Tuesday in



Mr Trump's ex-housekeeper Victorina Morales as a guest. PHOTO: NYTIMES

unmistakable defiance of President Donald Trump. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Mr Trump's arch-rival in Washington, led many in her caucus in wearing white to honour the fight for suffrage rights, which women earned 100 years ago in the United States. Seated together, the women sent a striking visual message, a challenge to Mr Trump and how he and his administration have addressed issues important to women. WASHINGTON POST

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Jokowi hits out at 'Russian propaganda' in polls run-up

But Russian Embassy, Prabowo rebut President's accusations

Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

Indonesia's election race has been jolted by accusations from President Joko Widodo that his challenger was using "Russian propaganda" as an attack strategy and was using a "foreign consultant", drawing sharp rebuttals from the camp of his opponent Prabowo Subianto and the Russian Embassy.

Mr Joko, widely known as Jokowi, told a gathering in Surabaya, East Java, last Saturday that a campaign team had been disseminating messages – with the help of a foreign consultant – without regard for the truth, which has raised tensions and divided society.

"There's a campaign team that has been preparing... Russian propaganda, which constantly spews... slander, sins and hoaxes," he said.

Though he did not name the campaign team, Mr Prabowo is his only challenger in the April 17 presidential polls.

"They don't care whether it would cause divisiveness in society, whether it would disturb peace, whether it would worry the public," Mr Joko said, describing the propaganda as a systematic drive to "produce non-stop slander, lies and hoaxes that confuse the people". He did not immediately explain what he meant by "Russian propaganda".

Mr Joko said he was also perplexed at being called a foreign puppet, arguing that it was under his administration that Indonesia managed to take a 51 per cent majority ownership of a lucrative copper-



Mr Prabowo Subianto (left) is challenging President Joko Widodo in the April 17 polls. Mr Joko claims a campaign team has been disseminating messages without regard for the truth. PHOTOS: FACEBOOK/PRABOWO SUBIANTO, ANTARA

The President cited some examples of hoaxes allegedly spread on social media by supporters of Mr Prabowo. For instance, there was a claim that about seven containers stuffed with ballots cast for Mr Joko for April's election would be arriving at a Jakarta port from China. Immediate field checks by the independent General Election Commission found no such containers, he said.

Mr Joko said he was also perplexed at being called a foreign puppet, arguing that it was under his administration that Indonesia managed to take a 51 per cent majority ownership of a lucrative copper-

The Russian embassy in Jakarta responded on Twitter: "We underline that the principal position of Russia is not to intervene in the internal affairs and electoral processes of other countries, including Indonesia, which is our close friend and important partner."

gold mine in Papua from United States-based Freeport-McMoRan, which has been operating in the Indonesian province since the 1970s.

"Do not call anyone a foreign puppet, while he himself is a foreign puppet... He has hired a foreign consultant," Mr Joko said, without saying who he was referring to.

The Russian Embassy in Jakarta responded on Twitter: "We underline that the principal position of Russia is not to intervene in the internal affairs and electoral processes of other countries, including Indonesia, which is our close friend and important partner."

The embassy said on Monday that the term "Russian propaganda" was engineered in the US in 2016 during the presidential election campaign, and that "the term is not at all based on reality". Russia has been accused by some US officials of meddling in the 2016 polls to tilt the result to favour Mr Donald Trump, the eventual winner. Moscow has denied the allegations.

On Tuesday, Mr Irawan Ronodipuro, a director for Mr Prabowo's campaign team, called Mr Joko's claim "false". "We regret that the President has made insinuations about a foreign consultant... We do not use foreign consultants," Mr Irawan said in a statement. "The President's statement is false".

Asked to explain what he meant by "Russian propaganda", President Joko said on Tuesday that he used the term to describe his rival's campaign strategy, but that it had nothing to do with the Russian government.

"We are not referring to Russia as a country in this case," Mr Joko said. "This is not a matter of state affairs. President (Vladimir) Putin and I have a very good relationship."

Mr Andi Widjajanto, a close adviser to Mr Joko, said the President was referring to the Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" propaganda model that was used in the 19th century against Russian rulers. Disinformation was massively and repeatedly used, Mr Andi said, adding that the same model was used in the 2016 US and 2018 Brazil elections.

Mr Aribowo Sasmito, head of the fact-checker committee at the Indonesian anti-slander society, said worries about disinformation affecting the April election results are justified, pointing out that Indonesia is the world's fourth-largest user of social media.

"Hoaxes are effective tools to net voters in certain groups, including the intolerant and the conservatives. They quickly spread any information they like, regardless whether it is false information," Mr Aribowo told The Straits Times.

wahyudis@sph.com.sg

Indian right-winger arrested for shooting Gandhi effigy



Pooja Shakun Pandey, a member of the right-wing group Hindu Mahasabha, shot an effigy of India's independence hero Mahatma Gandhi with an air pistol last Friday to mark his assassination some seven decades ago. She was arrested on Tuesday. The video of the shooting went viral, sparking anger. PHOTO: TWITTER/AFROZ ALAM

NEW DELHI • A right-wing Indian woman who shot an effigy of independence hero Mahatma Gandhi with an air pistol to mark his assassination some seven decades ago has been arrested, police said yesterday.

Pooja Shakun Pandey was filmed shooting the effigy at an event by a far-right Hindu group last Friday – the 71st anniversary of Gandhi's death. The video sparked anger after going viral online.

Gandhi was assassinated on Jan 30, 1948, by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu fanatic angered by what he saw as Gandhi's pandering to Muslims and by the partition of India after independence.

Some present at Friday's event chanted Godse's name and people took turns firing at the effigy, which had a balloon inside that burst with red liquid resembling blood. It was then set on fire.

The event took place in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh and was organised by right-wing group Hindu Mahasabha, the same organisation to which Gandhi's killer was linked.

Pandey – a senior figure in the group and a former lecturer – was arrested on Tuesday on charges of stoking violence and rioting, a local police officer said.

She was taken to court and a judge remanded her in custody, the officer said.

Thirteen others from Hindu Mahasabha involved in the recreation of the killing, including Pandey's husband, have either been arrested or are on the run.

The organisation observes the anniversary of Gandhi's assassination as "Bravery Day" and organises public events to glorify Godse, who was hanged with a co-conspirator in 1949.

Gandhi's death led to nationwide outrage against the far-right group, pushing it to the fringes of Indian politics for many decades.

But the election of Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 has emboldened the organisation to celebrate Godse's ideology.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China tycoon loses Aussie PR status, barred from entry

SYDNEY • A prominent Chinese billionaire political donor has been stripped of his Australian residency and barred from returning to the country after scrutiny of his Com-

munist Party ties, local media reported yesterday.

Mr Huang Xiangmo – a property developer who has donated millions to Australia's two main politi-

cal parties – has been at the centre of a spate of political interference concerns.

He was yesterday left stranded outside the country after Australia's Home Affairs office cancelled his permanent residency and turned down his application for Australian citizenship, the Sydney Morning Herald reported.

Quoting unnamed sources, the Sydney Morning Herald said Mr Huang had his application for an Australian passport blocked for a range of reasons, including what the paper said were "character grounds" and concerns over the "re-

liability" of information he had supplied in interviews.

Australia's spy agency has long voiced concerns that China was interfering in Australian institutions and using the political donations system to gain access. It reportedly warned the country's political elite about taking donations from Mr Huang and fellow billionaire property developer Chau Chak Wing.

In 2017, disgraced Australian senator and one-time opposition Labour power broker Sam Dastyari quit politics over his links to China.

The Sydney Morning Herald said Mr Dastyari had repeatedly con-

tacted immigration personally to check on Mr Huang's case.

Previous reports have said he also warned Mr Huang that his telephone had been tapped by Australian intelligence.

Canberra last year introduced sweeping reforms to its espionage and foreign interference laws, strengthening laws for offences and introducing new ones targeting the foreign influence of domestic politics.

The laws have strained relations with Beijing, which dismissed the claims of meddling as hysteria and paranoia. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Billionaire Huang Xiangmo is banned from Australia over his Communist Party ties. PHOTO: YUHU GROUP

Not all sectors hit by China's economic slowdown

BEIJING • If China's economy is weakening, someone forgot to tell Ms Jasmine Wang.

"My parents haven't asked me to cut back on my spending," said Ms Wang, a 22-year-old graduate student in Beijing who collects limited-edition fragrances from brands such as Chanel and Guerlain that can cost up to US\$300 (S\$406) each. She said her parents are paying her monthly bills of about 6,000 to 8,000 yuan (S\$1,200 to S\$1,600) and will keep supporting her if she struggles to find a job.

Ms Wang is just one member of China's Generation Z trying to find her way in a country of 1.4 billion, but her story gets to the conundrum facing investors trying to assess the world's second-largest economy.

While Apple, Caterpillar, Volkswagen and other companies are sending tremors through Wall Street with warnings about softness in China, others are sounding more bullish, including fashion brands that might appeal to affluent consumers like Ms Wang.

"We are not seeing a slowdown," said Mr Patrice Louvet, chief executive of Ralph Lauren. The company reported revenue in China growing by 19 per cent last quarter.

The two camps have come into stark relief in recent weeks. China's rapid economic growth of years past is slowing, and the trade war with the US has unsettled businesses.

Dozens of multinationals have sounded the alarm about weakening demand and, in cases like Caterpillar, reported unexpected de-



Paris-based luxury giant LVMH, which owns Louis Vuitton, is among the consumer companies still upbeat about business in China despite warnings of a softening economy from other multinationals operating in the country. Across 195 fourth-quarter earnings calls analysed by Bloomberg Intelligence, 100 firms cited a slowdown in China, according to a Feb 4 report. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

clines in sales in the fourth quarter. Hundreds of Chinese companies also have issued profit warnings.

But in addition to Ralph Lauren, Paris-based luxury giant LVMH and UK distiller Diageo are upbeat about business in the Asian nation.

Earnings reports this week from L'Oréal, Pernod Ricard and Capri Holdings – the owner of the Jimmy Choo and Versace labels – may also provide further insight.

"If you're a young Beijing person, and your parents have raised you as an only child, you might not feel the effects," said associate professor of economics Sara Hsu at the State University of New York at New Paltz,

who specialises in the Chinese economy. "But that certainly doesn't cover a lot of people."

China has always been a difficult economy to read. The government produces less data than other major nations and uses public assistance that can make it hard to assess the real health of demand.

The slowdown has hit a wide variety of products: vehicles, automotive parts, Tupperware containers, computer chips from Intel and Nvidia, softwood and fluff pulp from International Paper, Hitachi's construction machinery and chemicals from DowDuPont.

The list goes on: Many are run-of-

China has always been a difficult economy to read. The government produces less data than other major nations and uses public assistance that can make it hard to assess the real health of demand.

the-mill goods, the first links in the supply chain.

Across 195 fourth-quarter earnings calls analysed by Bloomberg In-

telligence, 100 companies cited a slowdown in China, according to a Feb 4 report.

"The irrational exuberance they used to have, that China was a slam dunk and such an untapped opportunity, has now been pretty tempered," said Mr Steve Pasierb, president of the Toy Association, a trade group for manufacturers.

"Yes, the population growth is still happening there and growth in the middle class, but things have slowed." Many of the companies that have bucked the gloomy trend are consumer businesses.

Alibaba Group beat earnings estimates, Unilever said China is re-

silient, while French kitchen-appliances maker SEB said it is still bullish about its two-digit growth forecast for China this year.

Rich Chinese are still splurging on Louis Vuitton handbags and Hennessy Cognac. There is even evidence that rural shoppers are buying more expensive liquor.

But if history is any guide, the wealthy are often the last to feel an economic downturn.

Mr Alex Du from Beijing, a retail worker in his 30s, said he does not have a lot of savings, and could not afford a car. "Pretty much spend every penny I make," Mr Du said.

BLOOMBERG

US team due in Beijing for talks next week

Officials likely to push for deal protecting US intellectual property, and averting tariff hike

GAINS FOR U.S. TREASURY

We are now making it clear to China that after years of targeting our industries, and stealing our intellectual property, the theft of American jobs and wealth has come to an end. Therefore, we recently imposed tariffs on US\$250 billion of Chinese goods – and now our Treasury is receiving billions and billions of dollars.



US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP, on trade negotiations with China.

WASHINGTON • Senior US and Chinese officials are poised to start another round of trade talks in Beijing next week to push for a deal to protect American intellectual property and avert a March 2 increase in US tariffs on Chinese goods, two people familiar with the plans said.

The sources said on Tuesday that the US delegation would begin arriving in Beijing over the weekend, following a break this week for Chinese New Year.

"I have great respect for President Xi, and we are now working on a new trade deal with China," US President Donald Trump said in his State of the Union address on Tuesday, referring to his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, while adding that any new trade deal with China "must include real, structural change to end unfair trade practices, reduce our chronic trade deficit and protect American jobs".

The new round of talks in Beijing, to be led by US Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, was earlier reported by the Wall Street Journal, which cited an unidentified senior administration official.

A USTR spokesman said the agency had no new announcements to make on the issue. A Treasury Department spokesman could not be reached for comment.

Mr Trump has vowed to increase US tariffs on US\$200 billion (S\$271

billion) worth of Chinese imports to 25 per cent from the current 10 per cent if the two sides cannot reach a deal by 12.01am on March 2.

Bilateral talks have centred on addressing American demands for deep structural changes to China's economic and trade policies, including new protections for US intellectual property, ending forced technology transfers, reining in China's subsidies for state industries and increasing Chinese purchases of US farm, energy and manufactured products.

The Journal said that China has agreed to widen the trade discussions to include cyber hacking.

In his speech at the Capitol in Washington, Mr Trump blamed past US administrations and lawmakers "for allowing this travesty to happen" between the world's two largest economies and said his tariff strategy is working.

"We are now making it clear to China that after years of targeting our industries, and stealing our intellectual property, the theft of American jobs and wealth has come to an end," Mr Trump said.

"Therefore, we recently imposed tariffs on US\$250 billion of Chinese goods – and now our Treasury is receiving billions and billions of dollars," he added.

Mr Trump said last week in Washington that he would meet Mr Xi in the coming weeks to try to seal a comprehensive deal, possibly as part of a trip to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

That summit will take place on Feb 27 and 28 in Vietnam, Mr Trump said on Tuesday.

REUTERS, BLOOMBERG

China says US report on its WTO compliance incorrect

BEIJING • China opposes a report by the US Trade Representative's office on its World Trade Organisation (WTO) compliance, the commerce ministry said, adding that it is inconsistent with the facts.

The report was based on US domestic law rather than WTO agreements and multilateral rules, the ministry said in a statement late on Tuesday. A considerable part of the accusations against China in the report exceeded its commitments to the WTO, lacking legal and factual

basis, the statement added.

China firmly supports the multilateral trading system and participates in the reform of the WTO, and clearly opposes unilateralism and protectionism, it said.

Negotiating new WTO rules to try to rein in China's "mercantilist" trade practices would be largely a futile exercise, the Trump administration's trade office said on Monday, vowing to pursue its unilateral approach to protect US workers, farmers and businesses.

The US Trade Representative's office used its annual report to Congress on China's WTO compliance in part to justify its actions in a six-month trade war with Beijing aimed at forcing changes in China's economic model.

US President Donald Trump said last week he would meet Chinese President Xi Jinping in the coming weeks to try to seal a comprehensive trade deal with Beijing, but acknowledged it was not clear if a deal could be reached. REUTERS

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10-year-old abused girl dies in Japan despite pleas for help

Second such case in a year shines light on child protection system that is often exploited by parents

Walter Sim
Japan Correspondent
In Tokyo

When Mia Kurihara, 10, told her teachers that she was being subjected to constant abuse and violence from her father, little did she expect that this complaint would be relayed to her very abuser.

“I’m being assaulted by my father. He wakes me up in the middle of the night, and, even in the day when I’m awake, he kicks and beats me,” she wrote in a questionnaire. “Teacher, can’t you do anything?”

Her teacher from a school in Noda city in Chiba prefecture, east of Tokyo, listed on the form the descriptions of abuse as recounted verbally by Mia: “gagged and pressed against the floor”, “kicked in the head, back and neck and got punched”, and “did the same thing to mother”.

Mia, whose name bears the Chi-

nese characters xin ai or “beloved”, was found dead in her bathroom on Jan 24 after missing school for two weeks. Her father Yuichiro had told her school that she would be absent until Feb 4 because “the family was visiting my native Okinawa”.

Her parents have been arrested. Yuichiro, 41, who was an employee at the Tokyo office of the Okinawa Convention and Visitors Bureau, was nabbed last week for inflicting bodily harm on his daughter while his wife Nagisa, 31, was arrested Monday for abetting the violence.

A victim of domestic violence herself, Nagisa is said to have told investigators that she did not intervene to protect Mia out of fear that Yuichiro would turn violent on her.

Mia’s father denied ever abusing her, and insisted that he had promptly called the police at 11.10pm on Jan 24 after she lost consciousness when they got into a scuffle when she was being punished. He admitted, however, to having drenched her in cold water and grabbing her by the neck during the punishment, that began at about 10am.

But domestic reports cited police sources as saying that rigor mortis had already set in by then.

Last Monday, Chiba police said an autopsy did not reveal any major injuries or diseases, and failed to identify the direct cause of Mia’s death. She was not malnourished.

The family of four – the couple have another daughter, who is aged one – was far from picture perfect, and neighbours have told domestic media that they have heard constant shouting from their home.

Mia’s death has again shone a harsh spotlight on Japan’s child protection system that has often been exploited by abusive parents at the expense of their children.

This is second high-profile fatal incident in under a year, following the heart-wrenching case of five-year-old Yua Funato, who died in March last year begging for her stepfather’s approval, and writing journal entries such as “please, please, please forgive me”.

Her case sparked a national backlash so severe that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe vowed to strengthen abuse prevention measures to better protect children, who are increasingly becoming a precious resource for a country grappling with a plummeting birthrate.

The backlash this time was like-wise swift.

Within two days of news emerging last Thursday that the Noda City education board had been pressured into giving up the copy of Mia’s questionnaire to her father, the city hall was flooded by more than 1,000 complaints from irate members of the public who said the move was a “betrayal of trust by vulnerable children”.

A member of the education board, Mr Masahiko Yabe, reportedly said officials rationalised that letting the father know what his child was thinking would serve as a deterrent for abuse.

Education Minister Masahiko Shibayama said officials were questioning Noda City officials over how they handled Mia’s case, adding: “It is my strong belief that the death was caused by the board conveying the contents of the questionnaire to the father.”

DAILY ABUSE

Police suspected that Yuichiro subjected Mia to physical and mental torment on a daily basis.

The family had relocated in September 2017 from Itoman in Okinawa prefecture to Noda, where Mia was first enrolled in Yamazaki Elementary School.

The abuse allegedly began in Okinawa. According to Kyodo News, a friend of Mia’s in Itoman recalled her as having said: “When my mum is not around, dad slaps me and it’s very painful. I wish she was with me all the time.”

The friend also reported seeing bruises on Mia’s back when they were changing their clothes for sports class.

But while Itoman welfare officials were aware of her case, they said they did not pass this information on to their counterparts in Noda as they were “unable to confirm” if the alleged abuse was true.

This, it has emerged, was because two scheduled house visits by Itoman officials were abruptly cancelled by the Kuriharas.

In November 2017, Yamazaki Elementary in Noda conducted the written questionnaire in which Mia divulged to her school that her father was abusing her.

The school informed city officials, who then alerted the nearest child welfare consultation centre in neighbouring Kashiwa city.

The centre took Mia into protective custody on Nov 7, 2017, but released her on Dec 27 after she said she wanted to go home. This led the centre to conclude that the abuse was “not serious”, and it let her go with the condition that she stayed with other relatives.

But Mia failed to turn up for the first day of school on Jan 9, 2018. Three days later, a meeting was called with Yuichiro and his wife.

There, Yuichiro lambasted the school’s handling of the matter and menacingly threatened to sue the city education board unless it gave him Mia’s written questionnaire, which ironically had promised confidentiality in its instructions.

BETRAYAL OF CHILD

It surely must have been obvious that the father’s abuse would escalate once he learnt that his daughter had reported his behaviour to the school. It is also easy to imagine how the girl, who made a desperate call for help, would feel betrayed and become unable to trust adults.

A menacing attitude that scares adults would be unbearable for a child. Why the officials failed to see this obvious fact is baffling.



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN, in a damning editorial on Saturday.

This was refused at first on the grounds that Mia’s consent was required. But Yuichiro returned three days later with a document ostensibly bearing Mia’s consent.

On Jan 18, 2018, Mia was transferred to Futatsuka Primary School, also in Noda, on her parents’ wishes. She moved back with her parents two months later, in March.

Ten months later, Mia is dead. During this period, not once did she complain of abuse, nor did welfare centre officials pay a single visit to the family home.

The Asahi Shimbun said in a damning editorial on Saturday: “It surely must have been obvious that the father’s abuse would escalate once he learnt that his daughter had reported his behaviour to the school. It is also easy to imagine how the girl, who made a desperate call for help, would feel betrayed and become unable to trust adults.

“A menacing attitude that scares adults would be unbearable for a child. Why the officials failed to see this obvious fact is baffling.”

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Field of illicit gains



A farmer working in an illegal poppy field in Hopong, Myanmar’s Shan state, on Sunday. Fields of purple opium poppy stretch across the pastures and peaks of mountainous eastern Myanmar, with many farmers reluctant to give up the profitable cash crop in spite of incentives offered. Myanmar is the second biggest source of opium in the world after Afghanistan, with Shan state its main production hub. Myanmar is part of the Golden Triangle, together with Thailand and Laos, the source of much of the world’s opium. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China ‘hacked’ Norway’s Visma to steal client secrets

LONDON • Hackers working on behalf of Chinese intelligence breached the network of Norwegian software firm Visma to steal secrets from its clients, cyber-security researchers said yesterday.

The attack was part of what Western countries said in December was a global hacking campaign by China’s Ministry of State Security to steal intellectual property and corporate secrets, according to investigators at cyber-security firm Recorded Future.

China’s Ministry of State Security has no publicly available contacts.

The Foreign Ministry did not respond to a request for comment, but Beijing denies any involvement in cyber-enabled spying.

Visma took the decision to talk publicly about the breach to raise industry awareness about the hacking campaign, which is known as Cloudbopper and targets technology service and software providers in order to reach their clients.

Cyber-security firms and Western governments have warned about Cloudbopper several times since 2017 but have not disclosed the identities of the firms affected.

Reuters reported in December that Hewlett Packard Enterprise and IBM were two of the campaign’s victims, and Western officials cautioned in private that there were many more.

IBM said it had no evidence sensitive corporate data had been compromised, and Hewlett Packard Enterprise said it could not comment on the Cloudbopper campaign.

Visma, which reported global revenues of US\$1.3 billion (\$S1.8 billion) last year, provides business software products to more than 900,000 companies across Scandi-

navia and parts of Europe.

The company’s operations and security manager, Mr Espen Johansen, said the attack was detected shortly after the hackers accessed Visma’s systems and he was confident no client networks were accessed.

“But if I put on my paranoia hat, this could have been catastrophic,” he said. “If you are a big intelligence agency somewhere in the world and you want to harvest as much information as possible, you of course go for the convergence points, it’s a given fact,” he added.

In a report with investigators at cyber-security firm Rapid7, Recorded Future said the attackers first accessed Visma’s network by using a stolen set of login credentials and were operating as part of a hacking group known as APT 10, which Western officials say is behind the Cloudbopper campaign.

The US Department of Justice in December charged two alleged members of APT 10 with hacking US government agencies and dozens of businesses around the world on behalf of China’s Ministry of State Security. REUTERS

Huawei offers to build centre for cyber security in Poland

WARSAW • China’s Huawei has offered to build a cyber-security centre in Poland, where the authorities arrested a Chinese employee of the telecommunications firm along with a former Polish security official on spying charges last month.

“We are ready to establish a cyber-security centre in Poland if authorities accept this as a trusted solution,” Mr Tonny Bao, head of Huawei in Poland, told a news conference yesterday.

Huawei has set up information security labs in Germany and Britain aimed at building confidence that its equipment does not contain “back doors” for Chinese intelligence services.

Poland’s government is set to exclude Huawei equipment from its future 5G network over concerns first raised in the United States that Huawei technology could be equipped with such back doors, sources told Reuters.

Huawei’s regional public affairs director, Mr Austin Zhang, said there was no reason for the Polish government to exclude the Chinese firm from its future 5G network development.

“If it does happen... we will try all our means to protect our business and reputation in Poland,” Mr Zhang said.

The US envoy to the European Union said last week that Washington wanted to steer people away from Huawei towards Western products because of its concerns over the security of the Chinese company’s technology.

Huawei denied allegations that its technology could be used for spying, and the Chinese executive from Huawei arrested in Poland said he was not guilty.

Still, the company faces increasing international scrutiny over the matter.

Last week, it was excluded from a tender to build a Czech tax portal after the country’s cyber watchdog warned of possible security threats.

Separately, the US Justice Department charged Huawei with conspiring to violate US sanctions on Iran and with stealing robotic technology from US wireless operator T-Mobile. REUTERS

Malaysia's debt-laden Felda set to end ties with Rajawali

Plantation group seeking return of \$677m as Indonesian firm did not meet deal conditions

Leslie Lopez
Regional Correspondent
In Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's political fallout is set to single one of corporate Indonesia's biggest players.

The Federal Land Development Authority (Felda), Malaysia's largest state-owned plantation grouping, is proposing to walk away from its controversial partnership with the Jakarta-based Rajawali Group and demand the return of more than US\$500 million (\$677 million) it ploughed into a clutch of oil palm estate and sugar-related manufacturing assets in Indonesia in May 2017.

Felda's controversial acquisition of a 37 per cent interest in the Rajawali's Eagle High Plantations Tbk came with a so-called "put option" that provided for the Malaysian concern to sell back the equity interest at the purchase price of US\$505.4 million, together with an annual interest charge of 6 per cent that must be borne by the Indonesians.

Felda's board of directors resolved to exercise the put option in a letter on Jan 3 to Rajawali, which is controlled by businessman Peter Sondakh, on grounds that the Indonesian concern failed to meet key conditions under the original transaction that was personally driven by former prime minister Najib Abdul Razak.

Under the deal, Eagle High was required to secure the Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil certification, an internationally recognised accreditation that allows for access into key markets, before the end of 2019.

Felda executives noted that the Indonesian group had made little progress in securing the certifica-

tion, leaving it with little choice but to walk away from the deal.

Executives from Rajawali, which has diversified business interests in telecommunications, agriculture, retail and mining, did not respond to queries from The Straits Times.

Malaysian government officials directly involved in the ongoing restructuring of the debt-laden plantation group Felda acknowledged that Rajawali has informed Felda that it intends to challenge the put option in court.

A messy and protracted court case will be closely watched because it will spotlight the toxic mix of politics and business at Felda during the Najib administration - which was voted out last May - that has left the company in dire financial straits.

An ongoing audit into Felda's operations has revealed widespread mismanagement and serious irregularities in its domestic and international acquisitions.

Successive financial losses since 2013 have placed a serious squeeze on cash flows and Felda's ability to service its debt load that has jumped to over RM8 billion (\$2.7 billion) in mid-2018 from RM1.5 billion in 2009.

That, in turn, has more than tripled the group's debt-gearing ratio to 46 per cent, from 14 per cent during the same period.

A company's debt-gearing ratio reflects the proportion of a company's debt to its equity and offers



Rajawali Group is controlled by businessman Peter Sondakh, the 14th richest Indonesian.

a quick snapshot of the financial risks it is exposed to.

Felda has also been forced to revalue its inflated assets that have been written down to roughly RM1.5 billion from RM2.4 billion previously.

There is a strong political dimension to Felda's woes for Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's Pakatan Harapan coalition government.

Felda was established in 1956 as the brainchild of Tun Abdul Razak Hussein - Najib's father - and offered land to settlers, who now work on dozens of plantations of rubber trees, sugar cane, oil palm and other crops.

Felda settlers and their families - who total more than a million people and are from the dominant ethnic Malay group - dictate the outcomes in 54 Felda enclave seats of the country's 222 parliamentary constituencies, making them a very important component in Malaysia's fractured political landscape.

Felda's deepening financial woes are having an adverse effect on the already tough lives faced by its settlers, who work the oil palm plantations and depend on the state corporation for the take-up of their produce.

Government officials reviewing Felda's operations noted that nearly 80 per cent of its settlers owe the state corporation just over RM1 billion for livelihood advances taken to work the land, build homes and fund households before the plantations can be harvested.

Separately, Felda's settlers also owe the state corporation another RM4 billion for loans taken in replanting schemes.

The levels of defaults on both these loan classes are rising rapidly because a majority of the settlers are finding it difficult to keep up with repayments against a backdrop of rising costs of fertilisers and depressed palm oil prices.

A quick resolution to Felda's corporate deal with Rajawali would provide a much-needed financial injection for the group. But that appears unlikely.

The Eagle High deal was panned from the very beginning by investment analysts and bankers who warned that the Malaysian plantation group was grossly overpaying for an Indonesian asset controlled by Mr Sondakh, a billionaire ranked as Indonesia's 14th richest person on the Forbes list who continues to enjoy very close ties with Najib.

But the previous government went ahead with the deal by providing Felda with a seven-year government loan amounting to RM2.25 billion to finance the purchase that came with only two representations for the Malaysian concern in the Indonesian company.

Felda has since been forced to realise a loss of nearly RM1.7 billion in the Eagle High investment in its financial books.

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Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and her husband, PKR president Anwar Ibrahim (both centre), visiting Economic Affairs Minister Azmin Ali, who is convalescing at home from gall bladder surgery, yesterday. With them is Mr Azmin's wife Shamsidar Tahir. PHOTO: TWITTER/FARAH AMIRAH MOHAMED AZMIN

Azmin Ali gets visits from several VIPs after operation

KLANG • Malaysia's Economic Affairs Minister Azmin Ali received several important visitors over the past two days as he recuperated from gall bladder surgery.

The Malaysian King, Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Sultan Ahmad Shah, and Dr Siti Hasmah Ali, the wife of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, visited Datuk Seri Azmin in hospital on the first day of Chinese New Year on Tuesday.

As he convalesced at home yes-

terday, Mr Azmin was visited by Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) president Anwar Ibrahim and his wife, Deputy Prime Minister Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

Other visitors included Selangor Menteri Besar Amirudin Shari and Deputy Primary Industries Minister Shamsul Iskandar Mohd Akin, as well as their spouses.

Mr Azmin, who is on one-month medical leave, was discharged from a private hospital on Tuesday

where he had undergone surgery.

According to Mr Shamsul Iskandar, Mr Azmin was recuperating well and would be resting at home.

Mr Azmin is deputy president of PKR, and ties between him and Datuk Seri Anwar have been going through a rough patch recently.

Pictures of the visitors with Mr Azmin were posted on the Twitter account of his daughter Farah Amira Mohamed Azmin.

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Bangladesh protests to Myanmar over new refugees

DHAKA • Bangladesh has protested to Myanmar over a new influx of refugees fleeing the troubled Rakhine state after clashes between security forces and an insurgent group, an official said yesterday.

Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry summoned Myanmar's ambassador late on Tuesday to protest against the latest arrivals from Rakhine, already notorious follow-

ing a military clampdown on the Rohingya Muslims in August 2017, which sent more than 700,000 people escaping across the border.

The new arrivals are from Rakhine Buddhist and other tribal groups, a senior Foreign Ministry official told Agence France-Presse on condition of anonymity, without giving a figure.

"The number is increasing. Some

people are already waiting on the border and they may also enter. We have asked (Myanmar) to take effective and urgent steps so that violence is stopped," the official said.

A Bangladesh border guard official said the refugees had crossed in a remote hill area of Bandarban district in the south-east of the country.

Bangladesh is already struggling to cope with 740,000 Rohingya

Muslims who arrived after August 2017, adding to the 300,000 who had fled earlier violence in Rakhine.

Rakhine's ethnic majority, who are Buddhist, are now in conflict with the army they had helped just 18 months ago to drive out the Rohingya Muslims.

On Jan 4, the Arakan Army, a militant group calling for greater autonomy for Rakhine, killed 13 people in

raids on police border posts.

The army said 13 militants have been killed in reprisal attacks, while the United Nations said at least 5,200 people have been displaced by the violence.

An accurate death toll has been impossible to ascertain because the zone is under a near-blanket lockdown.

The fighting has added a new,

complex dimension to the troubles in Rakhine that since 2012 has seen religious and communal riots, the mass exodus of Rohingya and killings across all ethnic lines.

The Bangladesh protest came after Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie said on Tuesday that Myanmar must "show genuine commitment" to end violence that has driven the Rohingya into Bangladesh.

The United Nations is preparing to launch a new international appeal for nearly US\$1 billion (S\$1.35 billion) to look after the Rohingya.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



SPIKE IN DEMAND

Right now durians are gaining a lot of attention from the Chinese market. This deforestation for planting of durians is in preparation to meet that demand.

”

MS SOPHIE TANN, from environmental protection group Peka, which has studied land clearances to make way for the fruit.

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Our customers aren't concerned about the prices. They just want the best.

”

MR WANG TAO, shop manager of the Little Fruit Captain stall in Beijing, on customers preferring durians from Malaysia to those from rival exporters, such as Thailand.

Customers at the Little Fruit Captain durian stall in Beijing last month.

PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Chinese appetite for durians blamed for fresh deforestation

Malaysian jungles being cleared to meet demand, say activists

RAUB (Pahang) • Soaring demand for durians in China is being blamed for a new wave of deforestation in Malaysia, with environmentalists warning that vast areas of jungle are being cleared to make way for massive plantations of the spiky, pungent fruit.

Grown across tropical South-east Asia, the durian is hailed as the "king of fruits" by fans, who liken its creamy texture and intense aroma to blue cheese.

Detractors, however, say durians stink of sewage and stale vomit. The strong smell has led many hotels across the region to ban guests from taking them into rooms.

Nevertheless, they are a hit in China, and the increase in demand has prompted exporters to vie for a bigger share of the burgeoning market.

Growers in Malaysia are increasingly shifting from small orchards to industrial-scale operations – a trend that environmentalists warn presents a new threat to rainforests that are already challenged by log-

gers and oil palm plantations.

"Right now durians are gaining a lot of attention from the Chinese market," said Ms Sophie Tann, from environmental protection group Peka, which has studied land clearances to make way for the fruit. "This deforestation for planting of durians is in preparation to meet that demand."

In the jungle-clad district of Raub in the central Malaysian state of Pahang, swathes of rainforest have recently been chopped down to make way for a new plantation, with durian seedlings protected by netting planted across bare hillsides.

The plantation is next to a protected forest, which is home to a kaleidoscope of animals, from monkeys to exotic birds. A river, now murky and filled with trunks and branches from logging, runs nearby.

A sign outside the plantation says it is run by Ample Harvest Produce but company staff refused to comment when contacted about the loss of trees in the area.

Peka said the land's status was changed by the local government to allow logging, but the local authorities did not respond to requests for comment.

Meanwhile, in a Beijing mall

\$160

Price of a single Musang King on sale at a Beijing stall. That is several times more expensive than in Malaysia.

\$2.5m

The value of durian shipments from Malaysia to China in the first eight months of last year, more than double the value in the same period of 2017.

facility in Malaysia and sells them in plastic containers or in other forms – a kind of baked dessert, in ice cream or fried as crisps.

Customers are kept up to date about the shop's stock via the WeChat messaging app.

"I first tried durian as a child and acquired a taste for it," said university student Liu Zelun, who visits the shop once a week for her durian fix. "Thai durians have a stronger flavour and you tend to get sick of it after a while, but not the ones that I buy from here."

The most popular variety – and one of the most expensive – is Musang King, known for its thick, golden flesh. A single Musang King was on sale at the Beijing stall for 800 yuan (S\$160), several times more expensive than in Malaysia.

"Our customers aren't concerned about the prices. They just want the best," said Mr Wang.

With the price of key Malaysian export palm oil, used in everyday goods around the world from soap to margarine, in a seemingly inexorable decline, farmers are increasingly turning to durians.

The government has backed the expansion of the industry, hoping to cash in on growing demand from

the world's second-biggest economy. The value of durian shipments from Malaysia to China in the first eight months of last year hit RM7.4 million (S\$2.5 million), more than double the value in the same period of 2017, according to the agriculture ministry in Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia hopes a deal struck in August to pave the way for the export of whole, frozen durians to China will boost shipments, and is aiming to more than double production to 443,000 tonnes by 2030.

Previously, Malaysian durians could be shipped to China only in pulp and paste form.

Despite the looming production boom, the agriculture ministry insisted plantations will expand slowly and said it was encouraging growers to use existing orchards and revive unproductive trees.

"Deforestation for new areas is not encouraged," Agriculture Minister Salahuddin Ayub told Agence France-Presse in a statement, adding that if trees were logged for plantations, strict environmental rules must be followed.

In Kelantan state, tribespeople last year set up blockades to stop a company from logging their ancestral lands to set up a Musang King plantation. The central government has taken up their cause, suing the state government for failing to uphold their land rights.

But environmentalists warn that the overall picture is bleak.

Durian cultivation is "driving yet more deforestation and biodiversity loss in Malaysia", said environmental group Rimba, saying it was leading to "destruction of critical habitat for wide-ranging animals such as tigers, elephants, primates, and hornbills". AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Violence fails to derail autonomy vote in southern Philippines

MANILA • Hundreds of thousands of people in two Muslim-dominated provinces of the southern Philippines went to the polls yesterday, for the second part of a referendum on a new autonomous region, despite violence the day before.

Two explosions and a grenade blast took place in the provinces of Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato on Tuesday, with no injuries or damage reported, but electoral commission spokesman James Jimenez

said the violence did not affect yesterday's turnout.

Some 640,000 voters are registered to vote in the provinces for their inclusion in an autonomous region meant to allow self-governance for the Bangsamoro people as part of a peace agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2014.

"No amount of bombing or terrorist acts will scare, intimidate or

threaten the voters from participating in today's plebiscite," presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said.

Mr Panelo said the military and the police were deployed to safeguard the public and the democratic process.

On Jan 21, the first part of the referendum to create the new autonomous region was held in other areas in Mindanao.

The MILF was confident that people in North Cotabato would favour their inclusion in the autonomous region but unsure of its approval in Lanao del Norte, where the provincial governor campaigned for its rejection. DPA

UK woman jailed 6 months for slapping Bali airport officer

DENPASAR (Bali) • An Indonesian court yesterday jailed a British woman for six months for slapping an immigration officer in the face on the island of Bali after an argument over a fine for staying in the country after her visa expired.

Auj-e Taqaddas, 42, was found guilty by a court in Denpasar of violence against an officer at Bali's airport carrying out his legal duty, Judge Esthar Oktavi told Reuters.

"The sentence is six months in

prison," Judge Oktavi said by text message. The sentence was lighter than the one-year jail term sought by the prosecutor over the incident on July 28 last year.

"This is an unfair decision... I was forcibly brought to the court, no lawyers provided," Taqaddas told the court, accusing the prosecutors of torturing her three times and trapping her in the country.

The judge and prosecutor said Taqaddas had filed an appeal.

Her sentencing had been postponed several times because she was sick and also when the authorities could not find her in her hotel when they tried to pick her up for the hearing.

A smartphone video of the purported incident, which went viral at the time, showed Taqaddas shouting and swearing at the immigration officer, before slapping him across the face after grappling with him to snatch back her passport.

The woman had overstayed by about 160 days and was asked to pay a fine of 300,000 rupiah (S\$29) for each day, or about S\$4,600 in all. REUTERS

Smartphone use the norm in developed nations: Poll

Youth also more likely to have smartphones, use social media and access the Internet

WASHINGTON • Smartphone use has become the norm in most developed nations, while many emerging economies are showing sharp gains, a global survey showed.

The Pew Research Centre report released on Tuesday found strong majorities of adults using smartphones in the world's wealthier countries, led by a 95 per cent adoption rate in South Korea and 88 per cent in Israel.

In 18 developed countries surveyed, three out of four adults were using smartphones, the 2018 survey showed. Another 17 per cent used another kind of mobile phone and only 6 per cent used none.

The picture was mixed in the nine emerging economies surveyed, with smartphone adoption ranging from 60 per cent in South Africa to 24 per cent in India.

Taken together, an estimated 45 per cent of adults used smartphones in the emerging economies and one-third used other types of mobile phones.

In all the countries, smartphone usage was higher among younger people, those with higher levels of education and those with higher incomes, Pew found.

"Younger people in every country surveyed are much more likely to have smartphones, access the Internet and use social media," researchers Kyle Taylor and Laura Silver wrote.

"In all of the advanced economies surveyed, large majorities under the age of 35 own a smartphone. In contrast, smartphone ownership among advanced economies' older populations varies widely, ranging from just about a quarter of Russians 50 and older to about nine in 10 older South Koreans."

The survey also found an estimated 90 per cent of people in the 18 developed countries use the Internet compared with 60 per cent in the developed nations.

For social media, the percentage was 67 per cent in advanced economies and 49 per cent in other countries.

Some of the emerging nations are seeing rapid increases in smartphone use, especially by younger



South Koreans checking their smartphones. A Pew Research Centre report has found strong majorities of adults using smartphones in the world's wealthier countries, led by a 95 per cent adoption rate in South Korea. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

adults, the survey showed.

For example, 85 per cent of Brazilian adults under 34 used a smartphone, up from three in five in 2015. In the Philippines, the adoption rate more than doubled in three years to 71 per cent, according

to the Pew research.

India ranked lowest of the emerging nations with just 27 per cent using either the Internet or social media, Pew said.

The report is based on a survey of 30,133 people in 27 countries, conducted from May 14 to Aug 12 last year.

China, believed to be the largest smartphone market, was not included in the latest survey.

Among advanced economies, the Netherlands ranked third with 87

per cent of adults using smartphones, followed by Sweden (86 per cent), Australia and the United States (81 per cent), Spain (80 per cent), Germany (78 per cent), Britain (76 per cent) and France (75 per cent). AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Magnetic north pole mysteriously accelerates

WASHINGTON • The position of the earth's magnetic north pole is moving far faster than it has, sending scientists scrambling to put out a new model this week.

The magnetic north is the point at which the planet's magnetic field points vertically down.

The World Magnetic Model is critical to sea and military navigation as well as smartphones. It normally is updated every five years but the schedule has been pushed forward one year "due to unplanned variations in the Arctic region", the US National Centres for Environmental Information said.

The earth's magnetic field is generated mainly by movement of the liquid iron that makes up most of the earth's core, 3,000km below the surface. That movement is what makes the magnetic poles shift, but the cause of the recent acceleration remains a mystery.

Scientists at the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and British Geological Survey have had to update their model ahead of the late 2019 scheduled deadline.

"It's a very slow movement, but it's very real, and over several decades, it can be several degrees," said geophysicist Arnaud Chulliat. It does not matter much in the most populated areas, but "near the magnetic pole, the change is faster".

The model makes it possible to correct the direction indicated by the compass to find the geographic north, which is fixed.

Since the end of the 19th century the magnetic north has been heading towards Siberia. Since the 1990s, the movement has accelerated across the Arctic Ocean, from about 15km a year to 50-55km a year currently. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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US-Taleban peace talks worry India

Delhi frets over role of militants known to have links to Pakistan

Nirmala Ganapathy
India Bureau Chief
In New Delhi

Ongoing peace talks between the United States and Afghan Taleban militants could put India's economic and security interests at risk, particularly with the Taleban taking centre stage in them, some Indian analysts believe.

The Taleban is known to have links to India's regional rival Pakistan. The militants are also shunning the Afghan government in the talks. India has built good relations with the current and former governments, leaving it to revive relationships with other groups in Afghanistan.

The Taleban and the US are negotiating a draft peace framework, which American media reports say includes the US pulling out its troops within 18 months in return for a Taleban promise that it will not allow Al-Qaeda and the Islamic

State in Iraq and Syria to operate from Afghan territory.

Yesterday, the Taleban and Afghan politicians, including former president Hamid Karzai, sat down for a second round of talks in Russia in a parallel development.

But the Taleban has refused to meet the current Afghan government led by President Ashraf Ghani. India is yet to recognise the Taleban and has sent only retired diplomats to take part in Russia-sponsored talks with the Taleban last year – a sign of the discomfort it has in negotiating with the militants.

India's position is that it will support talks with the Taleban, provided that is what the Afghan government wants. So far, the Taleban has refused to talk directly to the Afghan government.

"India has to adjust itself to new realities and it is going to be a relatively difficult phase for Indian engagement in Afghanistan," said Professor Gulshan Sachdeva of the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

"Whatever happens in Afghanistan will be messy. Nobody really knows how things are going to evolve in the coming weeks... but

India has refused to put boots on the ground in Afghanistan but it has made substantial economic investments. Over the past two decades, it has spent more than US\$3 billion (\$4 billion) to build schools, roads, dams and a Parliament building.

some kind of direction is clear. Almost everybody has recognised the Taleban as a force. At this point in time, it seems the Afghan government is marginalised, which is not very good for India, which has reasonably good relations with the current government."

India has refused to put boots on the ground in Afghanistan but it has made substantial economic investments. Over the past two decades, it has spent more than US\$3 billion (\$4 billion) to build schools, roads, dams and a Parliament building.

It has initiated low-key security cooperation, offering helicopters and radars to Afghanistan. It is also helping to develop the Chabahar Port in Iran, which would provide an alternative route to Afghanistan instead of through Pakistan, which opposes growing Indian involvement in Afghanistan.

The growing role of the Taleban has also raised fears in New Delhi that it could lead to an increasing influence from Pakistan, which has long sought to reduce India's influence in Afghanistan.

"The strongest red line for India is to effectively allow the Taleban some parts of Afghanistan with limited oversight, which in turn creates concerns about Pakistan and terrorist camps operating out of those pockets," said Professor Srinath Raghavan, an expert in international relations at Ashoka University.

"For any future dispensation that leads to former members of the Taleban being inducted, India will ask for some kind of assurance, given the scale of what we have managed to provide by way of economic assistance."

Amid the developing situation in Afghanistan, India, according to

media reports, is reaching out to different countries with stakes in Afghanistan – including Iran, Russia and China – to discuss developments. India, in its last statement on Afghanistan, said that it would participate in "all formats of talks which could bring peace and security in that region".

Still, analysts said India could remain relevant in Afghanistan as long as it is able to keep its links with different groups.

"We talk to everyone who is open to talking to us and I think a certain degree of revival of certain kinds of relationship is needed with people who were part of the old Northern Alliance, like the Tajiks," said Prof Raghavan.

The Northern Alliance was an opposition group that included different ethnic groups such as the Tajiks, the Uzbeks and the Hazaras who fought against the Taleban.

"We should have a non-sectarian approach... India in this region is a significant player. India is obviously not in a position to influence the outcomes but it can remain relevant in Afghanistan."

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India's Hindu devotees head home after sacred bathing day



Indian Hindu devotees returning home the day after Mauni Amavasya, the most auspicious day for bathing, during the Kumbh Mela festival in Allahabad. Some 55 million Hindu devotees plunged into holy waters to cleanse their sins and seek salvation over the busiest days of the world's largest religious gathering, officials said on Tuesday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Temple board now supports letting in women

NEW DELHI • The board of an ancient Hindu hill temple in southern India said yesterday it now favours allowing female worshippers of menstruating age to enter, reversing its previous support for a centuries-old ban.

The board overseeing the Sabarimala temple also said it would withdraw from efforts to challenge the Indian Supreme Court's ruling that the ban on entry for females aged 10-50 must be ended to uphold rights to equality of worship.

The temple in Kerala state has been the site of tension since the ruling in late September. Thousands of devotees have blocked attempts by women to visit the site. Some protesters have threatened the women and pelted them with stones, causing injury to some and damaging property.

Yesterday, the Travancore Devaswom Board told the Supreme Court it would abide by its decision to open the temple to women, after holding off for months saying it did not want to violate a historic tradition.

"After the Supreme Court judgment, we discussed a lot. We realise that we should respect the judgment of the court," lawyer Rakesh Dwivedi told Reuters.

The board had decided to withdraw from petitions challenging the lifting of the ban because it now believed it was discriminatory, its president, Mr Padmakumar, who goes by one name, was quoted as saying by Reuters partner ANI.

After the Supreme Court ruling, Hindu groups physically blocked some women from entering the temple, though a number managed to get in with help from the police. Devotees and petitioners in favour of the ban have contended that women should not be allowed inside the temple to prevent its deity Ayyappan from breaking the oath of celibacy he is believed to be observing.

Some of them also consider menstruating women impure.

Pro-ban activists and politicians from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) called the temple board's decision a betrayal.

"The government has not shown the least respect to the sentiments of the devotees. The people of Kerala will give a fitting reply," Mr Sreedharan Pillai, state president of the BJP, said, blaming the state government led by a communist alliance of undermining Hindu traditions.

The temple pays homage to the god Ayyappan and draws millions of worshippers each year. Activist Rahul Easwar, the grandson of a former chief priest of Sabarimala, said the temple board had succumbed to pressure from the government. REUTERS

WhatsApp warns Indian political parties against abuse of tool

NEW DELHI • India's political parties have been abusing Facebook Inc's popular messaging service WhatsApp ahead of the country's general election and the company has warned them not to do so, a senior executive said yesterday.

WhatsApp declined to name the parties or give the exact nature of the alleged misuse, but there is

mounting concern in India that party workers could abuse the platform by using automated tools for mass messaging, or spread false news to sway voters.

The messaging app has become a key campaign tool used widely by workers of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition Congress party. The two have

accused each other of propagating fake news while denying they do so themselves.

"We have seen a number of parties attempt to use WhatsApp in ways that it was not intended, and our firm message to them is that using it in that way will result in bans of our service," Mr Carl Woog, head of communications for WhatsApp, told reporters.

The next general election must be held by May.

The platform's challenges in India are not unique. It was flooded with falsehoods and conspiracy theories ahead of last October's election in Brazil, raising concerns that it was being used to distort the political debate.

India is WhatsApp's biggest market with more than 200 million

users. Ahead of state polls in the western state of Rajasthan last December, BJP and Congress workers showed a Reuters reporter dozens of WhatsApp groups they belonged to and used for campaigning.

Mr Woog said the social media platform had engaged with political parties to explain the company's view that the app was not a "broadcast platform".

"We are trying to be very clear going into the election that there is abuse on WhatsApp. We are working very hard to identify it and prevent it as soon as possible," he added.

The BJP's head of information technology, Mr Amit Malviya, told Reuters he had not met WhatsApp representatives, and declined to comment further.

Congress' social media head, Ms Divya Spandana, said the party does not abuse WhatsApp.

WhatsApp has been at the centre of controversy in India since last year after false messages spread on its platform sparked a number of mob lynchings.

WhatsApp has tried to curb the spread of fake news by educating users through roadshow campaigns, as well as print and radio advertising. It also limited the number of people someone can forward a message to at one time.

WhatsApp, which has 1.5 billion active users globally, said yesterday that it bans two million accounts each month for sending bulk or automated messages. It did not say how many are banned in India. REUTERS

Twitter called up by India's parliamentary panel

NEW DELHI • Representatives of Twitter have been summoned to appear before an Indian parliamentary panel following complaints that the social media platform is biased against pro-ruling party and right-wing content.

The announcement was posted on Twitter late on Tuesday by Mr Anurag Thakur, the head of the Parliamentary Committee on Informa-

tion Technology and a member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

BJP spokesman Tajinder Pal Singh Bagga, who recently organised a protest in relation to the issue, yesterday accused Twitter of shutting down pro-BJP and right-wing accounts.

Right-wing users have com-

plained that their number of users fluctuates and that they are sometimes unable to track their retweets accurately.

Committee member Vinay Sahasrabudhe, also from the BJP, told broadcaster NDTV that the move was in response to complaints of a "partisan approach" and "ideological bias" by those managing content on Twitter.

Twitter officials will appear before the panel on Feb 11 to discuss "safeguarding citizens' rights on social/online news media platforms".

A Twitter spokesman said the company had no comment other than to confirm that "discussions with the government are ongoing".

The parliamentary committee is keen to determine how Twitter India deals with complaints of bias

and fake news. It has also sought to learn more about the technological tools being used to detect and filter such content.

Social media is playing an increasingly important role in India's elections in recent years, with leaders including Mr Modi commanding huge numbers of followers.

As many as seven million tweets were generated during elections in five Indian states this winter, according to the micro-blogging site.

India is scheduled to hold a general election between April and May. DPA

Likely World Bank chief critical of its task

Trump's pick for job faces attacks on his competence and support for bank's mission

WASHINGTON • Even before his nomination has been publicly confirmed, Mr David Malpass, US President Donald Trump's pick to run the World Bank, faces mounting attacks on his competence and support for the bank's mission.

Mr Malpass, Undersecretary of the Treasury for International Affairs, is an outspoken critic of the bank and its sister organisation, the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The President plans to nominate the former Wall Street economist to head the bank, a pillar of the global order that Mr Trump opposes, as soon as yesterday.

The appointment will likely trigger another clash between Mr Trump's "America First" views and the decades-old consensus over management of the global economy. Since 1944, when global financial institutions were created near the end of World War II, the US has selected the bank's president while European countries have controlled the top IMF job.

"Malpass has never distinguished himself with an interest in the mission of the World Bank," said Mr Tony Fratto, former White House and Treasury Department spokesman in the George W. Bush administration. "It's an odd career-capping type of appointment for someone with very little demonstrated interest in these topics. It's hard to see how he can be deemed qualified for this job."

Mr Malpass, 62, has been openly critical of both the World Bank and IMF, saying there was "a lot of room for improvement" in the bank's lending programmes. White House press secretary Sarah Sanders told reporters on Tuesday that Mr Malpass would be "a great choice" if Mr Trump formally nominates him.

"Globalism and multilateralism have gone substantially too far, to the point that they are hurting US and global growth," Mr Malpass told a House subcommittee in 2017.

Still, last year, he supported a US\$13 billion (S\$17.6 billion) capital increase for the bank, its first in eight years, which was packaged with reforms to internal operations and spending practices.

If confirmed to run the bank, Mr Malpass would seek to reduce lending to middle-income countries such as China and India, which he has said enjoy ready access to private capital markets.

He would replace outgoing president Jim Yong Kim, who resigned unexpectedly earlier this year to accept a private sector job managing infrastructure investments in developing countries. Mr Kim endured a rocky tenure at the bank, launching a disruptive reorganisation that alienated the rank-and-file.

In its most recent fiscal year, the bank doled out nearly US\$67 billion in financing, investments and guarantees, its annual report shows.

As word of the Malpass appointment leaked in recent days, it drew fire from bank allies. Mr Malpass lacks the high profile of some former bank presidents, such as Robert McNamara, former defence secretary; James Wolfensohn, a globe-trotting banker and investor; and Robert Zoellick, who had served as deputy secretary of state and chief US trade negotiator.

Mr Malpass was chief economist at Bear Stearns, the Wall Street investment bank that collapsed amid the financial crisis in March 2008. Seven months earlier, even as some of the bank's own hedge funds were failing, he authored a remarkably sunny Wall Street Journal opinion article that played down the danger of an economic downturn. "Housing and debt markets are not that big a part of the US economy, or of job creation. It's more likely the economy is sturdy and will grow solidly in coming months, and perhaps years," Mr Malpass concluded.

Little more than a year later, the economy toppled into the worst recession since the 1930s.

After Bear Stearns failed, Mr Malpass unsuccessfully sought the 2010 Republican nomination to run for the US Senate. In 2016, he joined the Trump campaign as an economic adviser.

Mr Malpass was forced to back-track as the Treasury Department disavowed his comments.

His nomination comes with several developing nations already impatient for a greater say in running international financial institutions.

The bank's board of executive directors ultimately determine the next president. The US controls almost 16 per cent of the votes, nearly four times China's share, while European countries have more than one-quarter.

"I think the Europeans will push back a bit," said one former US Treasury official, adding: "In the end, they'll probably swallow it."

WASHINGTON POST



Mr David Malpass has been openly critical of both the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, saying there was "a lot of room for improvement" in the bank's lending programmes. PHOTO: REUTERS

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TAKASHIMAYASG

Forecast for EU: Gloomy with growing economic headwinds

Downturn will aid anti-establishment fringe parties in May's European Parliament polls

Jonathan Eyal
Global Affairs Correspondent
In London

The European Commission, the European Union's executive body, is releasing its quarterly forecast for economic growth in the region later today.

It will not make happy reading, for evidence is mounting that the nations belonging to the euro single currency zone have hit a rough patch, with growth weakening in the second half of last year.

And there is no doubt that such an economic downturn will give a boost to anti-establishment populist fringe parties, just as the continent is gearing up for Europe-wide parliamentary elections in May.

From the start of this year, European Central Bank (ECB) president Mario Draghi has been warning about the economic risks facing the euro area, as all key indicators, from manufacturing to retail sales indices, point to a slowdown.

However, Mr Draghi tends to blame this downturn on the uncertainties of Britain's impending departure from the EU, economic wor-

ries about China's growth prospects and the enduring dangers of an escalating global trade war.

The implication is that Europe is not facing a systemic problem, but a combination of temporary difficulties that may disappear, thereby lifting prospects.

"We unanimously agree that the likelihood of a recession is low," reads the latest communique from the ECB's governing council.

Still, alarm bells are ringing in key European capitals.

Last year, Germany – Europe's powerhouse – registered an economic growth rate of only 1.5 per cent, down from the 2.2 per cent recorded in 2017. And for this year, the Berlin government is forecasting a growth rate of only 1 per cent, the lowest since 2013.

Germany's economy is still in rude health – unemployment is low, the budget is balanced and the government's coffers are overflowing with tax receipts.

Nevertheless, Economy Minister Peter Altmaier, a key ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel, has hinted at the introduction of tax incentives for corporate investments in technology research, and has already an-



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez (at right) meeting European Central Bank president Mario Draghi in Madrid on Monday. From the start of this year, Mr Draghi has been warning about the economic risks facing the euro area.
PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

nounced a small economic stimulus by releasing an extra €3 billion (\$4.6 billion) for spending on infrastructure projects.

Mr Altmaier, who reassured members of Germany's Parliament in a recent speech that the country's "good times can continue if we act smartly and prudently", also admitted his government needs "to strengthen the growth momentum and encourage companies to invest".

France, the euro zone's second-largest economy, has surprised forecasters by proving resilient to the strikes and demonstrations that have gripped the country in the final quarter of last year. They did not damage the economy as much as initially feared.

Still, French economic growth hit only 1.5 per cent last year, below the government's official forecast of 1.7 per cent and well below 2017's

growth rate of 2.3 per cent. Today's forecast from the European Commission is unlikely to cheer the French.

And unlike his German neighbours, President Emmanuel Macron does not have much room for manoeuvre. Last December, he announced a €10 billion giveaway to appease protesters, an outlay that could see the budget deficit hit 3.2 per cent this year, larger than permitted by EU treaties.

But as today's Commission forecast is likely to confirm, the biggest worry is Italy, Europe's fourth-largest economy.

The Italian government is forecasting a growth rate of only 1 per cent for this year, down from the 1.5 per cent initially predicted. But Italy's national bank, the Banca d'Italia, has contradicted the government's projections by downgrading the country's growth prospects to only 0.6 per cent, a figure that is almost certain to be confirmed by the Commission today.

And that will send shivers down the spines of all European politicians, for a downturn in the Italian economy is just about their worst nightmare. It will push Italy further into debt. The country's public debt already amounts to 132 per cent of its gross domestic product. Only Greece is more heavily indebted, and nobody wants to repeat Greece's bankruptcy drama, which at one point threatened to bring down the entire euro structure.

Furthermore, escalating public debt and a weak economy could well push Italy's vulnerable banking sector into collapse, with catastrophic consequences for Europe as a whole. While the EU now has mechanisms in place to bail out banks, the mere activation of such funds could spark panic in financial markets and amplify a crisis.

Either way, Europe's economic downturn could not have come at a worse time, just as countries prepare for May's elections to the European Parliament. Current projections indicate that centre-right political parties will remain the biggest bloc in the next EU Parliament.

But the more economies struggle, the higher the potential vote for anti-establishment far-right and far-left fringe parties.

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Pope Francis greeting people during his weekly general audience yesterday in Vatican City. The pontiff's public admission on the sexual abuse of nuns by priests and even bishops marks a new chapter in the crisis rocking the Catholic Church. He also alluded to an ongoing probe into another community, without naming it. PHOTO: DPA

Pope confirms sexual abuse of nuns by priests

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE • Pope Francis said the Roman Catholic Church has faced a persistent problem of sexual abuse of nuns by priests and even bishops, the first time he has publicly acknowledged the issue.

Catholic nuns have accused clerics of sexual abuse in recent years in India, Africa, Latin America and Italy, and a Vatican magazine last week mentioned nuns having abortions or giving birth to the children of priests.

But Pope Francis has never raised the issue until he was asked to comment during a news conference aboard the papal plane returning to Rome from his trip to the United Arab Emirates.

"It's true," he said on Tuesday. "There are priests and bishops who have done that."

The Pope's admission opens a new front in the long-running scandal of sexual abuse by priests, recognising nuns who have tried for years to call attention to their plight.

The pontiff said his predecessor Benedict XVI had dissolved a religious order of women because of

"sexual slavery on the part of priests and the founder".

The Church has "suspended several clerics" and the Vatican has been "working (on the issue) for a long time", he said. The abuse was "still going on, because it's not something that just goes away like that", he added.

Last November, the organisation representing the world's Catholic women's religious orders, the International Union of Superiors General, publicly denounced the "culture of silence and secrecy" that contributed to abuse, and urged nuns to report abuse to law enforcement.

A top official in the Vatican office that handles sexual abuse allegations resigned last month after a former nun accused him of making sexual advances during confession.

The official, the Reverend Hermann Geissler, chief of staff in the Vatican's doctrinal office, denied the allegation, the Vatican said.

An article last week in Women Church World, the women's magazine of Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano, blamed the abuse on the outsized power of priests.

"The abuse of women results in procreation and so is at the origin of the scandal of imposed abortions and children not recognised by priests," wrote the article's author Lucetta Scaraffia, a feminist intellectual and editor-in-chief of Women Church World.

Asked about these developments on Tuesday, Pope Francis said it was a continuing problem and that the Vatican was working on the issue. Some priests, he said, have been suspended. "Should more be done? Yes," he added. "Do we have the will? Yes. But it is a path that we have already begun."

Pope Francis' public admission on the issue marks a new chapter in the abuse crisis rocking the Catholic Church.

"It is the first time that the Pope, but also the Church as an institution, has publicly admitted this abuse is taking place, and that's hugely important," Ms Scaraffia told Agence France-Presse yesterday.

The congregation of nuns dissolved under Pope Benedict was the Sisters Mariales d'Israel, a spokesman for the parent order said.

Pope Francis said his predecessor had attempted to look into the order before he became pope. As cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the former pope had headed the Vatican department that investigates sexual abuse, but his efforts had been "blocked". Pope Francis did not say

Pope Francis' admission of the problem was "the umpteenth blow to the Church's image, but also an occasion to show that change really is under way", Ms Lucetta Scaraffia said. The key is "to strip priests of their air of power, which is what allows them to behave this way".

who blocked those efforts.

The pontiff also alluded to an ongoing investigation into another community, without naming it, but it is believed to be the Community of St Jean in France.

That community admitted in 2013 that the priest who founded it had behaved "in ways that went against chastity" with several women in the order, according to French Catholic newspaper La Croix.

Pope Francis' admission of the problem was "the umpteenth blow to the Church's image, but also an occasion to show that change really is under way", Ms Scaraffia said. The key is "to strip priests of their air of power, which is what allows them to behave this way".

NYTIMES, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

New York Times' 2025 target: 10m subscribers

NEW YORK • The New York Times' online subscriber numbers accelerated in the fourth quarter, prompting the newspaper company to set an ambitious new goal – hit 10 million subscriptions by 2025.

The publisher of the eponymous newspaper added 265,000 new digital subscriptions in the period, the biggest increase since the months right after the 2016 election.

The Times had 203,000 in the previous quarter and 109,000 in the quarter before that.

The paper ended the year with 3.4 million digital subscriptions and 4.3 million total subscriptions.

Times shares rose as much as 6.2 per cent to US\$28.59 in pre-market trading yesterday. That would be a 13-year high on a closing basis.

"Our appeal to subscribers – and to the world's leading advertisers – depends more than anything on the quality of our journalism," chief executive Mark Thompson said in a statement announcing the company's fourth-quarter financial results.

"That is why we have increased, rather than cut back, our investment in our newsroom and opinion departments. We want to accelerate our digital growth further, so in 2019, we will direct fresh investment into journalism, product and marketing."

While many newspapers have struggled to make up for print losses as readers move online, the Times has built a large digital subscription business.

Last month, BuzzFeed laid off 15 per cent of its workforce, roughly 220 employees; Verizon Media Group announced a 7 per cent cut in its media divisions, which equals about 800 positions; and a 10 per cent cut is under way at Vice Media.

Subscribers to the Times surged in the aftermath of President Donald Trump's election, before slowing in the first half of last year. But the online subscriber gains have picked up in recent quarters, reflecting the public's continued demand for news and the paper's marketing strategies.

The Times said it was about three-quarters of the way to hitting its goal set in 2015 of doubling digital revenue to US\$800 million (\$1 billion) by 2020.

Fourth-quarter revenue rose 10 per cent excluding the impact of an extra week in 2017, with subscription sales up 5 per cent and advertising sales up 11 per cent. Digital advertising revenue was up 23 per cent, while print advertising revenue fell 10.2 per cent.

The Times is also spending more to get those new subscribers. Marketing expenses increased to US\$48.6 million in the fourth quarter, up about 50 per cent from a year ago. BLOOMBERG, NYTIMES

QUALITY JOURNALISM VITAL

Our appeal to subscribers – and to the world's leading advertisers – depends more than anything on the quality of our journalism. That is why we have increased, rather than cut back, our investment in our newsroom and opinion departments. We want to accelerate our digital growth further, so in 2019, we will direct fresh investment into journalism, product and marketing.



CHIEF EXECUTIVE MARK THOMPSON, in a statement announcing the company's fourth-quarter financial results.



Australia's extreme weather 'driven by climate change'

CANBERRA • An increase in the severity and frequency of extreme weather conditions across Australia last year is "a new norm driven by climate change", according to a report released yesterday.

Temperatures nudged 50 deg C, bush fires ravaged rainforests and people were at increased risk of cardiac arrests because of heatwaves, the Sydney-based environmental group Climate Council said in its report.

It comes as hundreds of people wait in evacuation centres after 10 days of torrential rain and flooding in north-east Australia, while month-long bush fires have ravaged almost 200,000ha of land in Tasmania.

The report, titled "Weather Gone Wild", said extreme weather events were being influenced by climate change, "as they are occurring in an atmosphere that contains more energy than 50 years ago".

Heatwaves are starting earlier, becoming longer, hotter and occurring more frequently, the report said, adding that there were 12 times more hot temperature than cold temperature records set in Australia between 2000 and 2014.

The report also said extreme weather events were "very costly", as insurance companies paid out more than A\$1.2 billion (\$1.16 billion) last year in claims linked to them.

Climate Council chief executive Amanda McKenzie said Australia's Conservative government, which has been in power for five years, has obstructed action on climate change while extreme weather worsens.

"It's unconscionable," she said. "We are experiencing climate change right now across Australia, from flooding in Townsville to bush fires in Victoria and Tasmania."

Climate change is set to be a key political issue in national elections scheduled to be held before May. DPA

50deg C

How high temperatures went up in Sydney, resulting in bush fires ravaging rainforests and people at increased risk of cardiac arrests because of heatwaves.

\$1.16b

How much insurance companies paid out last year in claims linked to extreme weather events.

Above: Residents clearing mud from their house in Townsville. Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said officials are working to ensure affected locals would get access to recovery payments and support.

Left: Townsville resident Dave Mitchell helping to clean his brother's motel on Tuesday. PHOTOS: EPA-EFE

Queensland begins clean-up after massive flooding

Weatherman says worst is probably over; insurance claims for losses hit \$44m

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Just coming up the driveway, looking at all the mud, that's when it hit home. There are a lot of neighbours we've never met before and now we have, which is really nice. It's an unfortunate way to have to build community but it does.



MR CLAYTON LINNING, a Townsville resident, on how the community rallied.

TOWNSVILLE (Queensland) • Weary residents in Australia's flood-hit north-east returned home yesterday to begin a massive clean-up after almost two weeks of heavy rain, as the wild weather moved south to inundate more towns.

Communities remain cut off and thousands are still without power in the state of Queensland, but the weather bureau said the downpours that have seen areas doused with more than 300mm of rain daily were easing.

"It looks like the worst is probably over," Bureau of Meteorology forecaster Vinord Anand told Agence France-Presse. "We are still seeing rainfall rates that are meeting our se-

vere weather warning criteria, but rainfall totals are not as high as they have been in the last five to 10 days."

The daily rainfall totals were falling below 250mm and would "ease slightly" today and tomorrow as the monsoonal trough slowly moves offshore, he added.

Australia's tropical north typically experiences heavy rains during the monsoon season, but the recent downpours have seen some areas get a year's worth of rainfall in just a week.

The rains turned roads into rivers and were so incessant that the authorities were forced to open floodgates of a major dam on Sunday.

With floodwaters receding in

some areas of the hard-hit city of Townsville, residents headed home to help one another clean up their mud-caked properties.

"Just coming up the driveway, looking at all the mud, that's when it hit home," resident Clayton Linning told national broadcaster ABC yesterday.

"There are a lot of neighbours we've never met before and now we have, which is really nice. It's an unfortunate way to have to build community but it does."

Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said yesterday that officials were working to ensure affected locals would get access to re-

covery payments and support.

The Insurance Council of Australia added that claims were "rising by the hour", with losses of A\$45 million (\$43.5 million) from 3,500 applications so far.

More than 100 extra police have been deployed to help with the disaster, while the army, which has a major base in Townsville, has also been active.

Meanwhile, police said they have launched an investigation into the deaths of two men aged 21 and 23 after their bodies were found in floodwaters, amid local reports that officers had been chasing them after an alleged liquor store break-in.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



How an egg cracked the record on Instagram

NEW YORK • When Mr Chris Godfrey learnt early last month that the record for "likes" on an Instagram post was held by the celebrity and businesswoman Kylie Jenner, he took it as a challenge.

He remembers thinking: "Could something as universal and simple as an egg be great enough to beat that record?"

It could! Just nine days after the thought, that record was cracked.

Mr Godfrey had beaten Ms Jenner's post about her infant daughter with a simple picture of an egg. The original egg post now has more than 52 million likes – Ms Jenner's post is shy of 19 million – and the egg's account now has more than 10 million followers.

Why an egg? Mr Godfrey explained: "An egg has no gender, race or religion. An egg is an egg, it's universal."

The 29-year-old, who works for

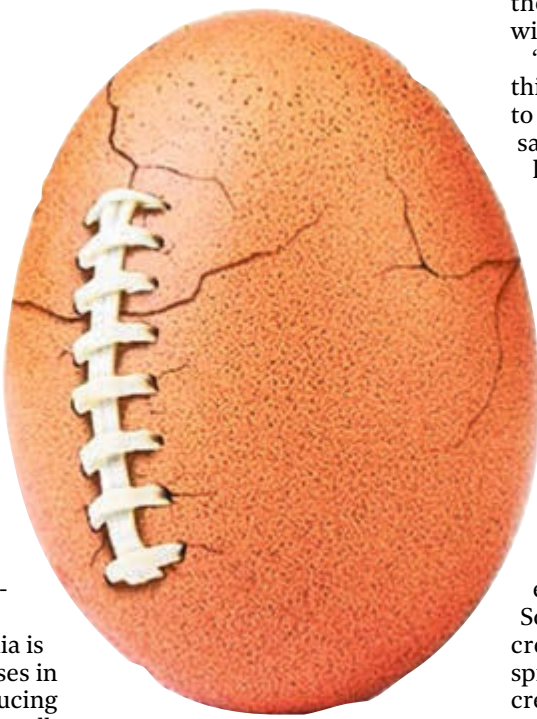
creative agency The & Partners in London, and the two friends he enlisted to help him with the account have now delivered their second act.

It is a commercial produced with and aired on the streaming service Hulu, timed to take advantage of the annual US Super Bowl extravaganza.

In it, the egg shares a story about how going viral has affected its mental health.

"The pressure of social media is getting to me," the egg discloses in the commercial, after introducing itself. "If you're struggling, too, talk to someone."

The ad then directs viewers to the website for the non-profit Mental Health America. The creators say that mental health is the first of several causes that the egg – which



The original egg post now has over 52 million likes and the egg's account has over 10 million followers. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/WORLD_RECORD_EGG

they and their fans call Eugene – will come to stand for.

"People have fallen in love with this egg, and Eugene the egg wants to continue to spread positive messages," said Ms Alissa Khan-Whelan, 26, one of the friends working with Mr Godfrey.

After the birth of the egg on Jan 4, Mr Godfrey stayed anonymous. But he, Ms Khan-Whelan and another friend, C.J. Brown, 29, agreed to speak to The New York Times to tell their story and explain their intentions. "We felt that the time was right to come out," Ms Khan-Whelan said. "We can put any speculation to bed."

There has been a lot of puzzlement about how a picture of an egg created an Instagram frenzy. Some speculated that the account's creator had paid influencers to spread the word. Others even took credit for growing the egg's audience. Mr Godfrey said such claims are untrue and that the account's growth was "completely organic".

"I think it was perhaps the younger generation," he said. "In the schools and stuff, it started to spread... through playgrounds."

Marketers agreed that young people had been key to the egg's success. (Instagram technically requires users to be 13 to create an account, but that rule is often disregarded.)

The egg's audience was also amplified by Mr Godfrey's decision to incorporate user-generated content into the account's Instagram stories, where posts expire after 24 hours.

The team behind the egg declined to talk about the money it has been offered or the big names it has come into contact with, preferring to keep the attention focused on Eugene. (Asked about one marketer's claim that partnering with the account would be worth at least US\$10 million (\$13.5 million), Ms Khan-Whelan said the number was "greatly exaggerated".)

Mr Godfrey, Brown and Ms Khan-Whelan said they are less interested in money than in promoting positivity. "We've had plenty of amazing offers and opportunities that have come on to the table," Ms Khan-Whelan said. "So many. We've not really been sharing details because we don't think this is about us. This is about Eugene the egg and what the egg can do." NYTIMES

THE STRAITS TIMES

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The Straits Times says

Intelligence brief Trump should heed

The United States Intelligence Community's 2019 assessment of threats to US national security, presented on Jan 29, is, by its own description, the "nuanced, independent and unvarnished intelligence" that policymakers, security agencies and domestic law enforcement need to protect American lives and interests around the world. While the cantation about threats from China and Russia is entirely predictable, this year's assessment is noteworthy for observing that the two powers are more aligned than at any point since the mid-1950s, and that the relationship is likely to strengthen as some of their interests and threat perceptions converge in the face of perceived US unilateralism and interventionism.

This much is not entirely unexpected for any careful observer of global politics. At the 2017 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Russian and Chinese delegations held their own meeting on the sidelines of the security conference, reflecting their swiftly building strategic relationship. Russian Deputy Defence Minister Alexander Fomin, responding to a question on Chinese behaviour in the South China Sea, praised China as "a good country... a big country and a peace-loving country", saying that the Russian assessment arose from careful consideration of the global circumstances. At the time, Moscow was chafing at the US decision to base the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence missile system in South Korea.

However, government leaders and military planners will need to pay special heed to the intelligence assessment's next warning that as China and Russia seek to expand their global influence, they are eroding once well-established security norms and increasing the risk of regional conflicts, particularly in West and East Asia. At the same time, it says, some US allies and partners are seeking greater independence from Washington in response to their perceptions of changing US policies on security and trade, and are becoming more open to new bilateral and multilateral partnerships. This intelligence assessment is significantly on target. Across Asia, the perception is growing that the America-led era is diminishing.

While President Donald Trump's first reaction was to dismiss his intel chiefs as "passive and naive", he soon changed position, declaring they were all "on the same page". If so, Mr Trump could make a start by dropping his dislike for his predecessor Barack Obama's policies that, for instance, prevent him from acknowledging that Iran is keeping its side of the bargain on not developing nuclear weapons. The US strategic affairs community, for its part, should moderate its tendencies to view Russia from a purely Atlantic perspective that lead to policies, including sanctions, that push Moscow ever closer to Beijing and stop Mr Trump from improving ties with Russia. Under the circumstances, though, this may be a big ask.

HomeFront

The puzzling case of SMC's judgment on a doctor who was fined \$100,000

Why did the Singapore Medical Council tribunal impose a heavy fine on a doctor for not informing a patient of side effects of a common injection? And how will that decision affect how doctors practise medicine henceforth?



Salma Khalik

Senior Health Correspondent

Last month, a disciplinary tribunal convened by the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) released its judgment in the case of Dr Lim Lian Arn, an orthopaedic surgeon in private practice.

Dr Lim was given the maximum fine of \$100,000 for not informing his patient of the possible side effects of an injection he had given her. This judgment caused an uproar in the medical community because doctors say the H&L (steroid) injection that he administered is commonly used as it is a cost-effective treatment, and the side effects are rare and limited to a short period. Most doctors do not tell patients of possible side effects.

The Straits Times Forum pages carried several letters from doctors asking if they now need to alert patients to every possible side effect of every medication they give.

One doctor started a petition to Health Minister Gan Kim Yong that garnered more than 6,000 names. It sought clarification and stated that "the majority of the medical professionals performing these injections do not routinely take or document a detailed informed consent, as stated by the SMC's own expert witnesses".

The SMC responded, saying that doctors are not expected to inform patients of all possible complications.

It quoted an appellate court comment that an "information dump" would not be appropriate. Also, "a reasonable patient would not need or want to know and understand every iota of information before deciding on whether to undergo a proposed treatment", it said.

Few would argue with this stand. Most patients trust their doctors to do their best for them. Many would also not be able to process a laundry list of possible, though improbable, side effects. If the side effects are major or common, then of course the doctor needs to apprise the patient of them so that he can make a considered decision. The patient can also ask the doctor about side

effects and the doctor should be obliged to take the time to explain them.

This is the way medicine here is generally practised and given the SMC statement, going forward, nothing has changed – except when doctors give steroid jabs. But that was the basis for the doctors' worry, their letters and the petition.

To be honest, I found the entire process against Dr Lim, as well as the SMC's statement that followed, terribly confusing. On the one hand, the SMC implied that doctors do not really need to tell patients about the many possible, though unlikely, side effects of these injections. Its statement said: "It should be emphasised that Dr Lim was charged for wholly failing to inform the patient of any possible complications and not for failing to inform the patient of all possible complications that could arise from the H&L injection."

So Dr Lim's \$100,000 fine was NOT because he failed to inform the patient of the side effects of the jab, but because he did not tell her of any side effects of the treatment he was recommending.

The complete treatment consisted of bracing, oral medication and the injection. There was nothing mentioned in Dr Lim's hearing of needing to inform the patient of side effects of the oral medication or bracing, so that leaves only the jab.

In fact, the charge against Dr Lim was specific. It said that he "failed to advise the patient of the risks and possible complications arising from the administration of 10mg of triamcinolone acetonide with 1 per cent lignocaine in a total volume of 2ml ("H&L injection"), before administering the H&L injection into the patient's left wrist".

This means that the penalty meted out by the tribunal was because Dr Lim had not told the patient of the side effects of the jab, and only the jab.

Did the tribunal make a mistake in finding Dr Lim guilty of following the practice of most doctors here in not spelling out the relatively minor side effects of the injection?

Questions about the case

A number of questions arise from the judgment and recent SMC statement.

SHOULD THE COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE HAVE EVEN SENT THE CASE FOR A DISCIPLINARY HEARING IN THE FIRST PLACE?

According to the SMC statement,



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

the committee had asked two experts, who said they would have explained and taken notes to that effect. An expert during the hearing said it was "good practice" to do so.

But good practice is different from something that doctors are mandated to do. If doctors are hauled up for not following non-compulsory good practices, the list of doctors to be hauled up before disciplinary hearings would be extremely long.

The SMC's complaints committees need to be somewhat more discerning. Having said that, the committee is merely the first cut, to ascertain that there is a prima facie case, not that the doctor is guilty of an offence. That will be for the tribunal to ascertain.

WHY DID THE SMC ASK FOR A FIVE-MONTH SUSPENSION?

That is not a light penalty.

The SMC said it sought a five-month suspension "based on previous sentencing precedents involving similar circumstances".

That was rather puzzling. Let's just look at a couple of previous cases of like nature.

Dr Eu Kong Weng was found

guilty in 2011 of not sufficiently explaining the possible risks and complications in haemorrhoids surgery. The patient developed an infection. Dr Eu, who was then head of colorectal surgery at the Singapore General Hospital, was given a three-month suspension, which he appealed against.

The three-judge court upheld his guilty verdict and the three-month suspension, but said: "If we had the discretion, we would have imposed a shorter period of suspension. However, the law does not allow us to do that as the three-month suspension is the minimum mandated."

At that time, the maximum fine was \$10,000. Since then, the fine has been raised to \$100,000 to bridge the wide gap between a \$10,000 fine and a three-month suspension. What the patient suffered in that case was far more serious; Dr Eu had fought the case; and yet the appellate court would have preferred a lighter sentence.

In this case, Dr Lim pleaded guilty, saving a long litigious process, and the side effects were temporary. So why did SMC want five months when the appellate

court said three months was longer than was necessary for Dr Eu?

In another case, that of general practitioner Peter Yong Thiam Look, the SMC had asked for a suspension of four to six months and a fine of \$10,000.

Dr Yong was not only guilty of not informing his patient of possible side effects, but he also operated on the patient's finger in his clinic with the help of an assistant who was not a nurse, instead of in a procedure room or an operating theatre. It resulted in an infection in the patient's palm.

Dr Yong had a previous offence for which he was suspended for six months and fined \$5,000. Taking that into account, the tribunal ordered a six-month suspension and a \$10,000 fine.

Again, a repeat offender with a far more serious offence merited a six-month suspension and a \$10,000 fine. Was the SMC unduly harsh in asking for a five-month suspension for Dr Lim?

That the SMC asked for a five-month suspension set the stage for what followed, since it flagged how seriously the professional watchdog regarded the offence.

WHY DID THE TRIBUNAL FIND THE DOCTOR GUILTY, AND WHY SUCH A HEAVY PENALTY?

The fact that Dr Lim had pleaded guilty and asked for a \$100,000 fine is not sufficient reason for the tribunal to agree. He may have done so simply to avoid a protracted case, which would have been stressful. If the sentence had been too light, given the five-month suspension the SMC had asked for, there was the risk of SMC appealing for a more severe penalty – which means the case would drag on.

This, too, could have been the tribunal's reasoning in finding him guilty and meting out a \$100,000 fine. It's worth noting that the tribunal found the treatment "appropriate and reasonable".

If that was so, was it fair to Dr Lim? I don't think so, even if it is what he prefers, rather than dragging out the process and being cleared by the appellate court at a far later date.

So if the doctor involved is not complaining, one might ask: What's the problem? The problem is the precedent it sets.

Implications of the judgment

Since the SMC has upheld the tribunal judgment – it would be difficult for it not to, as its counsel had asked for even more severe penalties – going forward, it means that doctors giving H&L injections in future would also need to spell out all the possible side effects.

And by extension, side effects of other treatments of similarly low risk would also need to be spelt out.

Some doctors are already listing out the side effects for something as common as blood-taking for people going for health screening.

Will this spell a change in the way medicine will be practised here in future? Where patients are given information overload in order for doctors to protect themselves against heavy penalties?

Both the Ministry of Health and the SMC need to spell this out clearly and unequivocally.

Meanwhile, for doctors giving H&L injections, this is what the charge against Dr Lim said:

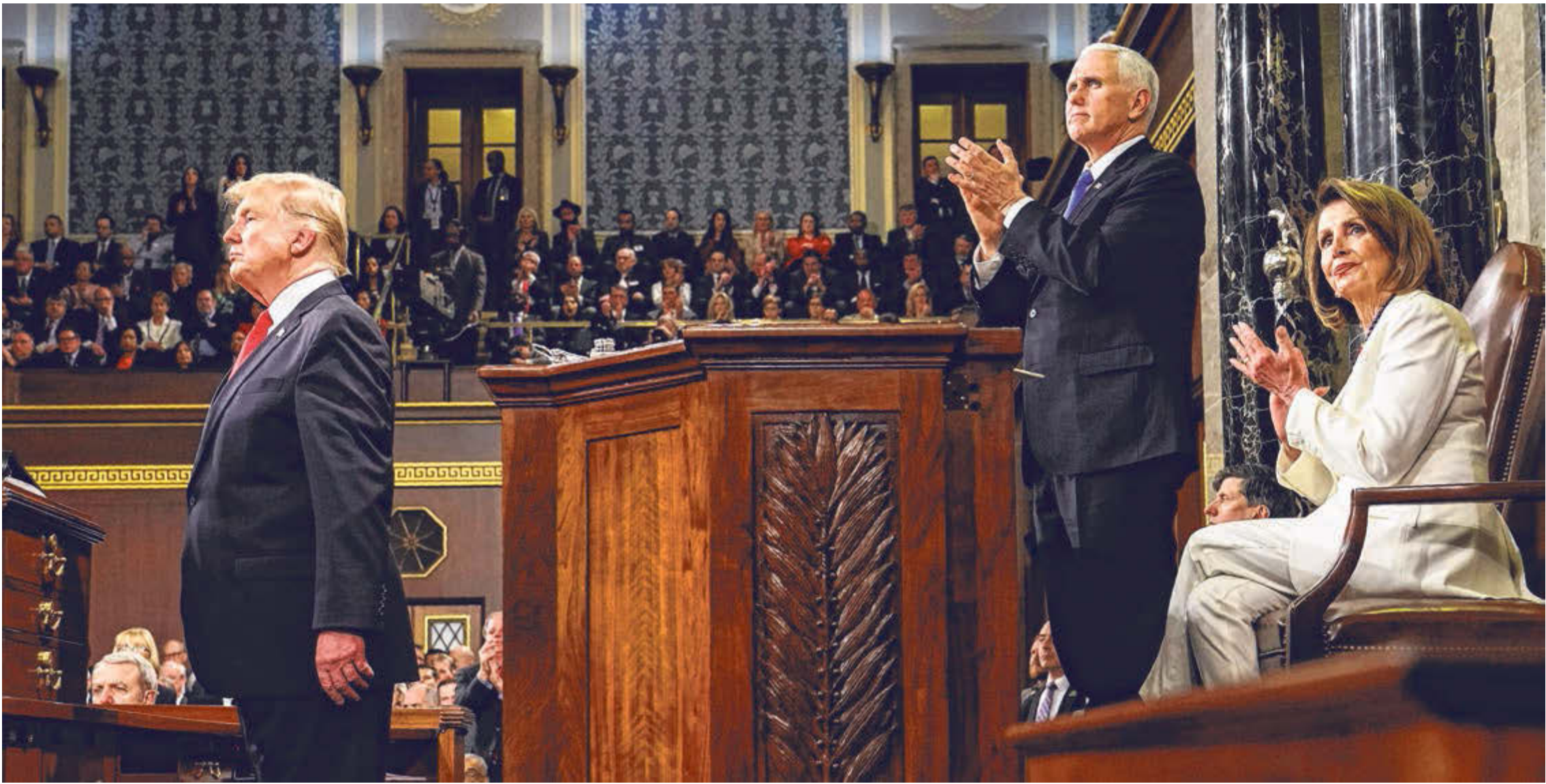
"You did not advise the patient of the risks and possible complications that can arise from the H&L Injection, namely:

- (i) post-injection flare, in particular, that:
- (1) the patient may experience increased pain and inflammation in the area injected that can be worse than the pain and inflammation caused by the condition being treated;
- (2) the onset of the post-injection flare is usually within two hours after the injection and typically lasts for one to two days;
- (ii) the post-injection flare can be treated by rest, intermittent cold packs and analgesics;
- (iii) change in skin colour, including depigmentation (loss of colour), hypopigmentation (lightening) and hyperpigmentation (darkening);
- (iv) skin atrophy (thinning);
- (v) subcutaneous fat atrophy;
- (vi) local infection; and
- (vii) tendon rupture."

Oh, and don't forget to document that you had done so.

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SEE FORUM B9



United States President Donald Trump delivering the State of the Union address at the US Capitol in Washington on Tuesday. With him are Vice-President Mike Pence and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

The speech of a president whose power is draining

Trump has backed himself into a corner on the wall from which there is no escape

Edward Luce

Once a year, Mr Donald Trump gives an uncharacteristically bipartisan speech to Congress. It is customarily sandwiched – often within hours – by venomous expressions of partisanship. Mr Trump’s 2019 State of the Union was no exception.

Earlier in the day, the President described Mr Chuck Schumer, the Senate Democratic leader, as a “nasty son of a b****”, and Mr Joe Biden, the former vice-president, as “dumb”.

A few hours later he called on

Americans to “rekindle the bonds of love and loyalty and memory that link us together”.

The puzzle is why he bothers to go through the motions. Perhaps even Mr Trump – the noisiest iconoclast ever to occupy the White House – feels bound by the weight of tradition. The difference is that his third attempt at conjuring national unity deceived no one.

His first address to Congress, which took place shortly after his infamous “American carnage” inaugural address in 2017, won rapturous reviews. Otherwise implacable critics said he had finally taken on a presidential mantle.

Such praise was quick to curdle. Two years later, no one believes Mr Trump is about to pivot to the political centre.

In spite of obligatory references to American greatness, moon landings, Normandy beach

invasions and Cold War valour, Mr Trump’s only real goal was the highly divisive – and familiar – one of building a wall with Mexico. He offered no plan on how to do it.

It was the speech of a president whose power is rapidly draining.

It came barely a week after Mr Trump caved in to Democratic pressure to reopen the United States government following a record 35-day shutdown without having secured a dime of funding for the wall.

It came just eight days before the US government is set to close again unless Mr Trump agrees to whatever Budget deal a bipartisan committee sends to his desk.

It will not include any funding for the wall. At which point, Mr Trump will sign it because he cannot afford to be blamed for another shutdown.

He is then likely to declare a national emergency – one that his

most loyal enforcers, most importantly Mr Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader, have declared in advance to be constitutionally unwise.

In spite of this, Mr Trump insisted on Tuesday night that “I’ll get it (the wall) built”.

He has backed himself into a corner from which there is no escape. Without a wall, Mr Trump’s base will drift away. Yet he can fund one only by manufacturing a crisis he would be almost certain to lose.

THE SOCIALIST THREAT

The other significant message in Mr Trump’s speech was an attack on socialism.

Cold War presidents would routinely warn against the Soviet version. It is hard to recollect a US president worrying about socialism at home.

Yet Mr Trump’s bromide was

borne of a shrewd political calculus. Many of the unapplauding Democrats in front of him today happily flaunt a word that was until recently taboo in US politics.

The brewing Democratic presidential primaries are turning into a social democratic beauty contest. Mr Trump knows he could profit from that.

“Today we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country,” he said to thunderous applause from half the Chamber.

As for the traditional laundry list of presidential to-do items, most Americans will struggle to name a single one 48 hours from now. The speech was remarkably light on specifics, even by Mr Trump’s standards. There was a content-free reference to infrastructure – no mention of cost, mechanism or rationale. He talked a little about lowering prescription drug prices and funding a cure for childhood cancer.

These were the most tired passages in the speech. It was clear Mr Trump neither expected, nor particularly wanted, to make bipartisan hay with the Democrats. The feeling was clearly mutual. The 2020 election is already under way.

Two things are clear. The first is that Mr Trump will bill the election as a battle between him and a socialist. “We were born free and we will stay free,” he said on Tuesday.

The second is that it will take place against the backdrop of a missing wall. FINANCIAL TIMES

Weimar Republic at 100: Echoes from the past

Germany is far stronger now than when the ill-fated republic came into being. Yet its shadow lingers on in the revival of populism and extremist politics.



Markus Ziener

For the Straits Times

BERLIN • This year Germans should have every reason to celebrate. A hundred years ago the first democratic republic in Germany came to life, the so-called Weimar Republic, named after the city where freshly elected deputies had gathered for the first time to constitute the new Parliament on Feb 6.

But the Germans are not in a party mood. First, because the memory of the republic, as democratic as it was, is heavily tainted. Weimar is seen as a flawed project, eventually enabling the Nazi terror that followed in 1933. Second, with the recent rise of populism and political extremes in today’s Germany, some of the characteristics of Weimar are casting long shadows up till now.

However, more and more historians, like Professor Robert Gerwarth at the University College

in Dublin and Professor Martin Sabrow of Humboldt University Berlin, are trying to do some justice to the republic founded in the aftermath of Germany’s defeat in World War I.

Prof Sabrow points to the many unfavourable circumstances the republic had to deal with right from the start. “We have to think anew about Weimar,” he demanded in a recent public speech in front of a packed audience in Berlin. “Our assessment is superimposed by Versailles, Hitler and the Second World War,” he says.

FALLOUT FROM TREATY OF VERSAILLES

In fact, the Treaty of Versailles was signed by the new German government only months after the republic came into being. In June 1919, in the Hall of Mirrors at the Versailles palace, the German delegation had to ink a treaty that was considered to be a tremendous humiliation to their country.

Germany, which had just turned from a monarchy into a republic, lost vast territories and with that, many citizens. It also had to deal with giving up most of its military, being allowed to keep only a residual force of 100,000 troops.

Moreover, the economic burden put on the new republic was so immense that it seemed impossible

that the war-torn country would get back on its feet any time soon. Only in the year 2010 did Germany transfer the last instalment of reparation payments stemming from the Treaty of Versailles.

Expectedly, anger and frustration over the peace treaty of 1919 ran high in Germany. The rage unloaded over the signatories of the treaty – the new democratic representatives – though they had not much to do with the defeat in World War I. This played into the hands of the old guard that was still supportive of the monarchy. They blamed the revolutionaries of 1918 for declaring defeat in war.

Subsequently the old guard publicly construed the revolution at home as a stab in the back of German soldiers on the front lines. This narrative, although manufactured and false since the German empire’s military was already on its knees, pushed the republic into a corner.

The streets of Berlin had turned into a war zone among the defenders of the old system, republicans and various volunteer corps made up of returning and disoriented soldiers.

The newly elected parliamentarians therefore had to move to the more peaceful Weimar, a city roughly 300km south of the capital, to lay the foundation of the next chapter in German history.

However difficult the start, the republic initially enjoyed a lot of support.

In the first national election in early 1919, democratic forces gained a comfortable majority, with the Social Democrats (SPD) coming

out as the clear victor. For the first time, women were allowed to take part in elections. Every citizen of at least 20 years old was allowed to cast a vote, thus doing away with the old “Dreiklassenwahlrecht”, which for decades had divided the population entitled to vote into three groups according to the taxes they paid.

The rights of the Parliament were also significantly strengthened. The significant flaws of the Constitution sketched out in 1919 came to light only later. The lack of sufficient protection for the media and freedom of expression made it easy to ban newspapers. Way too much power was given to the president of the republic.

Without an electoral threshold, too many parties were able to enter Parliament. Together with the system of proportional representation, it became more and more difficult to form a working government in the fragmented Parliament.

RISE OF EXTREMIST PARTIES

Extremist parties on the fringes of the political spectrum, capitalising on the tremendous economic problems that resulted in huge numbers of the unemployed, had no problem drumming up support. In other words: Life was made easy for populists offering simple answers to highly complicated questions. With the failure of the last government led by the Social Democrats in 1930, the demise of the republic ensued.

And today? Germany sees a rise of the left and right as well. To the left of the Social Democrats is the

party Die Linke (The Left), which has a strong moderate wing but at the same time still incorporates a minority fraction named the “communist platform”. The party holds 69 of the 709 seats in the German Parliament. In the eastern state of Thuringia, the regional prime minister is a member of Die Linke.

On the far right, Germany has seen the rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Party members of the AfD are notorious for their anti-refugee and at times anti-Semitic rhetoric – and probably will come under observation by the Federal Office for Protection of the Constitution. With 91 seats in Parliament, the AfD is the biggest opposition party,

The recipe for the success of populist movements today is not so much different as it was 100 years ago. Simplifying complex issues, making minorities scapegoats for societal shortcomings and resorting to the concept of nation as a remedy to the downsides of globalisation – all those ingredients still seem to work.

followed by the Liberals, the Left and the Greens.

Never before after World War II has Germany had so many parties in Parliament. Including the Christian Social Union (CSU), the Bavarian sister party of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Party (CDU), the German Parliament currently consists of seven parties.

In 2017, Germany experienced how difficult it has become to form a government. Only after six months was the Chancellor able to hammer out a compromise between CDU/CSU and SPD. Before that, other coalition talks had failed.

The recipe for the success of populist movements today is not so much different as it was 100 years ago.

Simplifying complex issues, making minorities scapegoats for societal shortcomings and resorting to the concept of nation as a remedy to the downsides of globalisation – all those ingredients still seem to work.

Luckily, the German Constitution and the political centre are still holding firm against the populist wave. As Holocaust survivor Saul Friedlander said recently in the German Parliament while commemorating the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp 74 years ago, Germany is a “strong bulwark” against those tendencies.

Hopefully, Mr Friedlander is right. Other democracies, whether it is Poland, the United States or Brazil, are telling a different tale.

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Japan targets complacency with cyber attack on citizens

Unprecedented hack of citizens’ 200 million Internet-enabled devices aims to reveal the nation’s vulnerability

Leo Lewis

Last November, when Japan’s 68-year-old minister for cyber security admitted he had never used a computer and was “not very familiar” with cyber security issues, it was, of course, hilarious. A few days later, with the world still guffawing, Mr Yoshitaka Sakurada doubled down, declaring that his main job was to perform error-free readings to Parliament of replies written by bureaucrats, before failing to do even that. The episode seemed to confirm a narrative of Japan that almost expects this type of superannuated bumbling and worries that it pervades both public and private sectors: those dire warnings of the

dulling of Japan’s technological edge made real by the empowerment of digital dinosaurs like Mr Sakurada. And yet, only a few months later, Mr Sakurada looks like a bold innovator. Or at least, the accidental leader of bold innovators. He stands ready to press the button next week on an unprecedented hack of 200 million Internet-enabled devices across Japan – a genuinely imaginative, epically scaled and highly controversial government cyber attack on homes and businesses designed as an empirical test of the nation’s vulnerability. A new law, fraught with public contention over constitutionally guaranteed privacy, was passed last May and has just come into effect to give the government the right to perform the hack and make this experiment possible.

The huge question is what happens if, as many experts suspect, the experiment reveals major vulnerability throughout Japan. Even that shock may not do the trick. There is an awful lot of complacency to shake off and while Japan is far from alone in that, all the top-down, Society 5.0 posturing makes it hard to shift.

The scope for government overreach, say critics, cannot be overstated. Webcams, routers and other devices will be targeted in the attacks, which will primarily establish what proportion have no password protection at all, or one that can be easily guessed. At best, say cyber-security experts at FireEye, the experiment could rip through corporate Japan’s complacency and elevate security planning from the IT department to the C-Suite. The experiment, which will run for five years and is being administered through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, is intended to focus on devices that fall into the broadly defined category of “Internet of Things” (IoT) – anything from a yoga mat that informs a smartphone of your contortions, to remotely controlled factory robots. And while cyber experts say IoT security may not be the very top

priority in the fight against cyber crime and cyber warfare, they see good reasons why Japan has chosen to make its stand here. The first is that the Shinzo Abe administration has made an industrial fetish of IoT, tightly weaving the concept into its grand “Society 5.0” policy narrative and seeing in IoT a chance to enhance the relevance and competitiveness of its manufacturers. These ambitions are fuelled by projections by IHS Technology that the world will go from about 27 billion connected IoT devices in 2017, to more than 40 billion by 2020. There is added urgency given the imminent roll-out of superfast 5G wireless networks and, for Japan, next year’s Tokyo Olympics where it hopes to showcase its technological prowess to the world. The second factor is that the government’s IoT push has, to some extent, captured the market’s imagination, and corporate Japan knows it. The theme consistently ranks towards the top of retail investors’ favourites, while companies such as Hitachi and Toshiba like to talk up their IoT strategies to help shed dreary conglomerate images. All this has come with warnings that the rise of IoT will create a vast new front of vulnerability unless the security of, for example, a Web-enabled yoga mat is taken as seriously by both manufacturers and users as the security of a

banking website. The big cyber-security consultancies, along with various governments, have historically relied on a range of gauges to calculate the scale of the problem. The Japanese government’s own National Institute of Information and Communications Technology (NICT) uses scans of the Dark Web to estimate that, of the cyber attacks it detected in 2017, 54 per cent targeted IoT devices. But Japan’s new experiment, say the officials administering it, will seek to put a hard percentage on the number of vulnerable IoT devices. The huge question is what happens if, as many experts suspect, the experiment reveals major vulnerability throughout Japan. Even that shock may not do the trick. There is an awful lot of complacency to shake off and while Japan is far from alone in that, all the top-down, Society 5.0 posturing makes it hard to shift. Even with the government’s pro-IoT drum-beating in the background, said Mr Itsuro Nishimoto, the president of Japanese cyber-security group LAC, the business of IoT security is not yet growing in Japan. There remain deep, unresolved questions of whether manufacturers of IoT devices or their users should have responsibility for ensuring security and a nagging concern that the government’s mega-hack will not conjure up an answer. FINANCIAL TIMES



Germany Economy Minister Peter Altmaier presented a new industrial policy on Tuesday which puts the country’s “industrial and technological sovereignty and capacity” at the forefront. The strategy calls for government support to ensuring the survival of existing national champions. PHOTO: REUTERS

Germany enters the global economic wars

Leonid Bershidsky

With the US and China increasingly competing rather than cooperating, Europe cannot stick to the old concept of globalisation. A draft of Germany’s new industrial strategy, presented by Economy Minister Peter Altmaier on Tuesday, is all about surviving in a competitive world – an approach he wants to sell to the German public first and then to the rest of the European Union. The competition, Mr Altmaier told a press conference in Berlin, is between three major economic blocs: The US, Europe and Asia. In this struggle for dominance, Europe – and Germany in particular – is being relegated to the status of passive observer. That, he said, is due in part to the support for national economic champions in the US and China. “There is hardly a successful country that relies exclusively and without exception on market forces to accomplish its tasks,” he wrote in his strategy paper. Germany and Europe, he argued, should move in the same direction, or risk losing more than the economic competition: If key technological competencies and, as a result, our position in the global economy were to be lost, this would have dramatic consequences for our way of life, for the capacity of the state to act and for its ability to shape almost all policy areas. And at some point also for the democratic legitimacy of its institutions. This kind of rhetoric is surprising to hear from an associate of

Chancellor Angela Merkel, an advocate of globalisation who, despite her conservative party’s ties with big business, always insisted on letting German companies compete under their own steam. But now Dr Merkel is a lame-duck chancellor, and Mrs Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, her successor as party leader, favours a more active industrial policy. Mr Altmaier’s proposals lay the groundwork for a new electoral platform, one that puts support for the country’s “industrial and technological sovereignty and capacity” at its forefront. Under this policy, for example, the government might have blocked Chinese appliance manufacturer Midea’s purchase of robotics firm (and German industrial jewel) Kuka in 2017. Mr Altmaier said that in a similar situation in the future, the government could ride in as a white knight, make a better offer and become a temporary owner – after all, doesn’t it already hold shares in the post office, the biggest telecoms operator and the railroad monopoly? To Mr Altmaier, “industrial sovereignty” means ensuring the survival of existing national champions such as Siemens, Thyssenkrupp, the country’s carmakers and Deutsche Bank. Europe’s antitrust authorities need to look beyond the region when defining the competitive arena, Mr Altmaier said in a clear reference to the opposition of EU trust-busters to Siemens and Alstom’s plans to merge their rail businesses. In this, he has the support of the country’s most powerful industrial

lobby, the Federation of German Industries, which recently made public its policy proposals on dealing with an ascendant China. The government, according to Mr Altmaier, should support major projects that help keep added value, and thus jobs, in Europe – such as the production of batteries and software for electric and autonomous vehicles. And it shouldn’t stand by idly when local technology companies get funding from US venture capitalists. “As a result, they become US companies step by step,” Mr Altmaier wrote. The examples he named included Munich-based data analytics specialist Celonis, translation engine DeepL and even Germany’s tech leader, SAP. Most of the latter’s shares are no longer in domestic hands. Mr Altmaier didn’t propose that the government should directly buy into promising start-ups, but he did say that ways must be found to make local private funding available. He suggested that “Germany must pool its entrepreneurial, scientific and political forces in the field of artificial intelligence”. That’s a clear echo of the “Airbus for AI” idea Mr Altmaier publicly backed last year – reproducing the success of the European airplane builder by creating a national tech champion and ensuring “data sovereignty”. If the above, with all the references to economic sovereignty, sounds surprisingly French, that’s not a false impression: Mr Altmaier has found a like-minded thinker in his French counterpart, Mr Bruno Le Maire. Where Germany was previously

somewhat cool about France’s more protectionist instincts, two of the EU’s biggest economies now appear to be in harmony about the need to fight off US and Chinese advances. In December, the two met at the “Friends of Industry” ministerial conference in Paris and agreed to cooperate on joint AI and battery projects. At that meeting, representatives from 18 EU states, including Italy, Spain and Poland, agreed on some basic policy ideas aimed at keeping the bloc internationally competitive; these included changes to antitrust rules to make it easier to create economic champions. So if Mr Altmaier’s strategy gets political support in Germany – which is likely, but isn’t assured given the left’s traditional distrust of big business – it should have legs on the EU level. Political wheels turn slowly, and a shift toward a more competitive stance based on economic sovereignty won’t have immediate consequences. But US President Donald Trump, with his protectionist policies and trade wars, the US Internet giants, with their contempt for European regulation, and China, with its aggressive expansion into Europe, are doing a lot to make this shift inevitable. An EU more focused on supporting local companies’ competitiveness will be a more difficult business environment for outside investors – and perhaps a tough rival, if the success of Airbus can be replicated in other industries. At least this time, though, the hostilities didn’t start in Europe. BLOOMBERG

Can Silicon Valley navigate its moral choices?

Katherine Boyle

Oh, how we miss the trolley problem. There’s a runaway trolley plunging towards a widow and five orphans, but if you pull the lever to divert it, you will hit Mr Elon Musk. Which do you choose? Not long ago, that diabolical choice was the hardest moral question a technologist was likely to face over the course of a typical day. (And it was utterly hypothetical, unless you were building autonomous vehicles.) Today, the average person in the tech space is likely to be pressed far more often on far more realistic moral quandaries. Such as: Which authoritarian regimes is it okay to make rich by letting them invest in your company? Is it worse to pay teens for their mobile activity data or to sell them lollipop-flavoured nicotine? If you refuse to work with the Defence Department, is it okay to work with Beijing? Welcome to the new ethics test, Silicon Valley: an adaptive quiz that becomes harder the more questions you get right. And with technology companies facing recurring media and regulatory scrutiny, company founders are finding it difficult to avoid the ethical chasm. If Silicon Valley was once converging on a moral cohesion of sorts – where progressive values and “wokemanship” acted as a loose ethical framework – it’s now becoming harder to avoid the varying ethical debates concerning privacy, addiction and growing geopolitical discord. Consider the recent outcry when TechCrunch reported that Facebook had been paying people (including teens) US\$20 (\$\$27) a month to download an app that monitors a user’s mobile and Web activity. Apple, long a privacy advocate and favoured troll of Facebook, reacted by cutting off “Facebook Research” and the company’s internal apps. Tech Twitter, however, seemed largely perplexed: In the future, won’t we all sell our data rather than give it away for free? Addiction has become another ethical landmine where dopamine hits – and how one administers them – are the key to a company’s growth. E-cigarette maker Juul Labs, founded in 2017 and now the fastest-growing start-up in history, with a valuation of US\$38 billion, is largely responsible for a grave new statistic: About 20 per cent of teens have admitted to vaping in school. In many ways, that shouldn’t surprise us. Juul is the logical extension of the Silicon Valley growth-hacking playbook: Design a

flawless product, add a dopamine response, stir in some influencers and watch your product, game or app go viral. Technologists are generally fine with designing elegant software that maximises engagement or obsession, even when it’s linked to increased prevalence of teen depression. But a screenless hardware device that delivers dopamine on demand? That crosses the ethical chasm. Most institutional investors have dismissed Juul’s success despite its adherence to the Valley growth playbook, but some investors are becoming more open to other vices. Marijuana and other legal cannabinoids have sucked up nearly US\$1 billion in private investments since 2012, raising the question: What kind of dopamine hits aren’t we comfortable with? For the virtuous founders avoiding addictive products and invasive data-gathering, even they have to worry about who’s getting on their equity ownership table. A year ago, Silicon Valley’s gender problem was so severe that accepting money from a firm that lacked diversity was heresy in many quarters. Now, founders have to wonder whether that seemingly diverse venture capital fund is backed by regimes where women, minorities and dissidents are killed for expressing themselves. The killing of Washington Post contributing columnist Jamal Khashoggi popularised the question: Who are your limited partners? But, by and large, it’s still easier to defend taking money from questionable sources than from a firm that looks plucked straight from an Ivy League rowing regatta, circa 1969. Business ethics is not a new field of inquiry, of course – industrialists have often championed their own brands of moralism. The field of study emerged in the 1970s, when it became fashionable at universities to question capitalism. In the 1980s, when finance fell off the moral bandwagon, business schools reacted by requiring students to take courses on Kant and other philosophers that had little to do with daily management worries. The field is becoming irrelevant now, when the dominant industry – technology – is decentralised and able to grow US\$40 billion companies in just 18 months. Some investors and watchdogs are trying to encourage start-up leaders to recognise their moral burdens from the moment of inception. The Time Well Spent initiative is an example of Silicon Valley’s ethical conscience, encouraging founders to monitor how product architecture affects the daily lives of their users. My own firm has published questions that we now ask all founders concerning how they can build “minimum virtuous products” instead of minimum viable ones. But, of course, the morality of a company often depends on the morality of the people in charge. So, yes, we all miss the relative simplicity of the trolley problem. By the time Silicon Valley converges on a moral compass that both Middle America and Washington can stomach, the trolley will be fully autonomous and on its third voyage to Mars. WASHINGTON POST

• Katherine Boyle is a venture capitalist at General Catalyst in San Francisco.



In Phnom Penh, the languid motorcycle-drawn carriage – called remorque in French and known colloquially as tuk tuk – is being muscled out by zippy Bajaj auto rickshaws driven by people using ride-hailing platform PassApp, says the writer. PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

S.E.A.View

On the road, algorithms aren't everything

Ride-hailing apps are changing commuter habits in South-east Asia, but they are a mixed blessing



Tan Hui Yee

Indochina Bureau Chief
In Yangon

One night in Yangon, as I bid goodbye to my friend and his wife after dinner, they widened their eyes in horror when I tried to wave down a passing cab. No, we will get you a Grab taxi, they insisted. My friend jabbed at his phone, trying to open the app, before realising that the cellphone signal was too weak to run the function.

His wife tried it on her phone but failed. Undeterred, the man gathered up his sarong and sat down on the steps outside the suburban mall. He roped in a friend who happened to walk by. The trio swiped resolutely at their frozen phones while streams of empty cabs roared past.

I have been through different variations of this experience in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, each time struck by how much ride-hailing apps have altered our attitudes to public transport.

App users wear that same bemused, half-pitying expression when they discover I do not use any. They cannot understand why I would pass up on a safer, cheaper, cleaner and easier way to travel, for what they consider an old-economy ride.

In Phnom Penh, languid motorcycle-drawn carriages – called remorque in French and known colloquially as tuk tuk – are being muscled out by the zippy Bajaj auto rickshaws that also ply the streets of Mumbai. These compact three-wheelers are driven by people using PassApp, another ride-hailing platform, where commuters can scan a QR code to pay their fare.

A slew of other tuk-tuk-hailing apps have surfaced in Cambodia, promising hassle-free pricing and safety features using the satellite-tracking function on our phones. The number of registered tuk tucks countrywide hurtled from 1,467 in 2017 to 19,412 last year. A director in Cambodia's Ministry of Public Works and Transport, when queried by The Straits Times, attributed this jump to more stringent law enforcement, and the

arrival of Indian-designed tuk tucks for the ride-hailing companies.

On the steamy streets of Ho Chi Minh City, when rush hour sees millions of motorcycles converge like salmon writhing upstream, the bright green helmets and jackets of Grab's bikers are conspicuous beacons. Grab, which has over 8.5 million drivers and agents, does not reveal the national breakdown of those figures. But the growth of its private car, taxi and motorcycle hailing services in Vietnam can perhaps be best approximated by the indignation it has triggered among traditional cab firms.

Taxi operator Vinasun sued Grab last year for unfair business practices and demanded 41 billion dong (\$2.4 million) in damages. In December, a court ruled in favour of Vinasun, but reduced the compensation payable to 4.8 billion dong. Grab filed an appeal last month.

Years of watching "disrupters" win over their customers have left conventional cabbies resigned and even desperate. One evening in Kuala Lumpur, I approached a beat-up red taxi, only to find a young boy curled up in its rear seat. He was fast asleep.

"Please, sit here," the driver pleaded, patting the front seat. "He's my son. He wants to spend time with me." After surveying the cab's forlorn but not quite filthy interior, I obliged, and he started the meter. "Thank you for taking my taxi," he pronounced with Shakespearean gravity halfway through the ride. "Nobody wants to take these taxis any more. Everybody is taking Grab."

A few months later, when I asked a remorque driver in Phnom Penh how much he would charge for a trip, he smiled and replied: "Anything."

Hooked up to the back of 125cc Honda motorcycles, the dramatic red chariots with carved wooden armrests are postcard-perfect but spend more time idle than their Bajaj rivals.

True to his word, the driver got on his motorcycle without further negotiation when I clambered aboard the carriage behind. Before moving off, he carefully tucked an iPad in a nook across his handlebars, to watch YouTube videos all the way. I could not muster the will to protest because we were travelling just a tad faster than a pedal-powered rickshaw.

THE TRADE-OFF

Without a ride-hailing app on my phone, I attract labels like technophobic, masochistic or eccentric. The truth is, I have not decided if more convenient travel is good enough reason to surrender personal information on my phone to a company.

In the new economy, where data is the strongest currency, and in the shadow of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, few promises of data



The growth of ride-hailing apps such as Gojek and Grab at the expense of old-economy rides has led the writer to wonder whether we are inadvertently trading one form of monopoly for another. PHOTO: REUTERS

Without a ride-hailing app on my phone, I attract labels like technophobic, masochistic or eccentric. The truth is, I have not decided if more convenient travel is good enough reason to surrender personal information on my phone to a company.

privacy are ironclad. And while new European Union data protection rules require companies to seek consent before harvesting users' information, people who choose to withhold consent are simply locked out of many digital platforms.

At least it is a choice that I knowingly make.

In Myanmar, the growth of ride-hailing apps is unfolding in an environment where digital literacy is low and digital rights, a nascent concept. The proliferation of SIM cards and budget smartphones preloaded with social media apps has made life easier, but also allowed more sinister groups to coordinate the spread of fake online content.

Some users do not know their Facebook passwords because their mobile phone retailer had started Facebook accounts on their behalf. Many do not know how to turn off the location-tracking function on their phone, or even know they have one.

To their credit, ride-hailing apps have kept transport providers on their toes. In Thailand, the government has introduced new taxis with inward-facing cameras, emergency alert buttons and location-tracking functions which deter speeding. More importantly, Bangkok has worked harder to crack down on cabbies rejecting passengers. That's a constant

hazard for Asians trying to get a ride in parts of downtown Bangkok, where drivers are more keen on serving white commuters in hopes of fat tips.

For many ride-hailing app converts, such progress is simply too little, too late. Armed with an algorithm, they will not be persuaded to reconsider what they have left behind, having determined it is needlessly unreliable.

THE WAY OF HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGES

As transport options evolve, Cambodia's remorques may eventually be relegated to tourist relics, much like the horse-drawn carriages in Myanmar's hilly resort town of Pyin Oo Lwin.

But certain principles endure. Diversity can never make us poorer. And competition widens choice. These days, whenever I meet yet another commuter who writes off any taxi driver not rated by an app, I wonder if we are inadvertently trading one form of monopoly for another, and losing the very choice these digital platforms created.

A palm-sized phone, armed with an algorithm, can now verify one's selfie, reduce pollution and generally minimise all sorts of taxi scams that plague visitors who don't speak the local language. Yet, there are only so many things an algorithm can do.

That night in Yangon, one of the three Burmese Samaritans finally latched on to enough bandwidth to hail me a Grab ride after several restless minutes.

My friend squinted at the taxi icon slowly moving across the map on the phone, before stepping in front of a cab he had identified out of the several lookalike Toyota Proboxes waiting around. Then, he pressed a fistful of 100 kyat (eight Singapore cents) notes into my hand. "Sometimes," he said, "they won't give you change."

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Let children get bored again

Boredom teaches us that life is not a parade of amusements. It spurs self-sufficiency and creativity

Pamela Paul

"I'm bored."

It's a puny little phrase, yet it has the power to fill parents with a cascade of dread, annoyance and guilt.

If someone around here is bored, someone else must have failed to enlighten or enrich or divert. And how can anyone – child or adult – claim boredom when there's so much that can and should be done? Immediately.

But boredom is something to experience rather than hastily swipe away. And not as some kind of cruel Victorian conditioning, recommended because it's awful and toughens you up.

Despite the lesson most adults learnt growing up – boredom is for boring people – boredom is useful. It's good for you. If kids don't figure this out early on, they're in for a nasty surprise.

School, let's face it, can be dull, and it isn't actually the teacher's job to entertain as well as educate. Life isn't meant to be an endless parade of amusements. "That's right," a mother says to her daughter in Maria Semple's 2012 novel, *Where'd You Go, Bernadette*: "You are bored. And I'm going to let you in on a little secret about life. You think it's boring now? Well, it only gets more boring. The sooner you learn it's on you to make life interesting, the better off you'll be."

People used to accept that much of life was boring. Memoirs of pre-21st-century life are rife with tedium. When not idling in drawing rooms, members of the leisure class took long walks and stared at trees. They went motoring and stared at more trees. Those who had to work had it a lot harder. Agricultural and industrial jobs were often mind-numbing; few people were looking to be fulfilled by paid labour.

Children could expect those kinds of futures and they got used to the idea from an early age, left unattended with nothing but bookshelves and tree branches, and later, bad afternoon television.

Only a few short decades ago, during the lost age of underparenting, grown-ups thought a certain amount of boredom was appropriate. And children came to appreciate their empty agendas. In an interview with *GQ* magazine, Lin-Manuel Miranda credited his unattended afternoons with fostering inspiration. "Because there is nothing better to spur creativity than a blank page or an empty bedroom," he said. Nowadays, subjecting a child to such inactivity is viewed as a dereliction of parental duty.

In a much-read article in *The New York Times*, *The Relentlessness Of Modern Parenting*, Ms Claire Cain Miller cited a recent study which found that regardless of class, income or race, parents believed that "children who were bored after school should be enrolled in extracurricular activities, and that parents who were busy should stop their task and draw with their children if asked".

Every spare moment is to be optimised, maximised, driven towards a goal.

When not being overparented, kids today are left to their own devices – their own digital devices, that is. Parents preparing for a long car ride or airplane trip are like army officers plotting a complicated land manoeuvre. Which movies to load onto the iPad? Should we start a new family-friendly podcast? Is this an okay time to let the kids play Fortnite until their brains melt into the back seat?

What did parents in the 70s do when kids were bored in the way-back? Nothing! They let them breathe in gas fumes. Torture their siblings.

If you complained about being bored back then, you were really asking for it. "Go outside," you might get, or worse, "Clean your room." Was this fun? No. Was it helpful? Yes. Because things happen when you're bored.

Some of the most boring jobs I've had were also the most creative. Working at an import factory after school, I pasted photos of ugly Peruvian sweaters onto sales sheets. My hands became encrusted with glue as the sweaters blurred into a clumpy sameness. For some reason, everything smelled like molasses. My mind had no choice but to drift into an elaborate fantasy realm. It's when you are bored that stories set in.

Checking out groceries at the supermarket, I invented narratives around people's purchases. The man buying eggplant and a six-pack of Bud at 9pm: Which was the must-get item and which the impulse purchase? How did my former fifth-grade teacher feel about my observing her weekly purchase of Nutter Butters?

Once you've truly settled into the anaesthetising effects of boredom, you find yourself en route to discovery. With monotony, small differences begin to emerge, between those trees, those sweaters.

This is why so many useful ideas occur in the shower, when you're held captive to a mundane activity. You let your mind wander and follow it where it goes.

Of course, it's not really the boredom itself that's important; it's what we do with it. When you reach your breaking point, boredom teaches you to respond constructively, to make something happen for yourself. But unless we are faced with a steady diet of stultifying boredom, we never learn how.

The idea isn't that you suffer through crushing tedium indefinitely. It's that you learn how to vanquish it. This may come in several forms: You might turn inward and use the time to think. You might reach for a book. You might imagine your way to a better job. Boredom leads to flights of fancy. But ultimately, to self-discipline. To resourcefulness. The ability to handle boredom, not surprisingly, is correlated with the ability to focus and to self-regulate.

Research has shown that people with attention disorders are particularly prone to boredom. It makes sense that in a hyperstimulating world, what at first seems captivating now feels less so; what was once mildly diverting may now be flat-out dull. It's especially important that kids get bored – and be allowed to stay bored – when they're young. That it not be considered "a problem" to be avoided or eradicated by the higher-ups, but instead something kids grapple with on their own.

We've stopped training children to do this. Rather than teach them to absorb material that is slower, duller and decidedly two-dimensional, like a lot of worthwhile information is, schools cave in to what they say children expect: fun. Teachers spend more time concocting ways to "engage" students through visuals and "interactive learning" (read: screens, games) tailored to their Candy Crushed attention spans.

Kids won't listen to long lectures, goes the argument, so it's on us to serve up learning in easier-to-swallow portions. But surely teaching children to endure boredom rather than ratcheting up the entertainment will prepare them for a more realistic future, one that doesn't raise false expectations of what work or life itself actually entails.

One day, even in a job they otherwise love, our kids may have to spend an entire day answering Friday's leftover e-mail. They may have to check spreadsheets. Or assist robots at a vast Internet-ready warehouse. This sounds boring, you might conclude. It sounds like work, and it sounds like life. Perhaps we should get used to it again, and use it to our benefit. Perhaps in an incessant, up-the-ante world, we could do with a little less excitement. NYTIMES

• Pamela Paul is the editor of the Book Review and a co-author of the forthcoming book *How To Raise A Reader*.

BIG PICTURE



WEATHER

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 34 deg C **Low** 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 23 to 50 (Good)



PHOTO: DPA

Bright side of German winter

On a wintry Tuesday, leafless trees in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, are a pretty sight to passers-by.

Over the past few years, Germany had seen a drop in snowfall during winter due to climate change, with

winter sport conditions less than ideal and businesses suffering.

This year, the snow is back. According to German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle, parts of Germany were engulfed by heavy snowfalls

early last month. The Alpine region was hit with the heaviest snowfalls for several years, causing avalanches and cutting off several winter resorts from the outside world.

Now, with the start of February,

the situation in Germany has eased. This is a boon for the resorts as the conditions in the Alps are now ideal for winter sports and the upcoming school vacation is likely to bring business.

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Felix Cheong has published 13 books across different genres, from poetry to short stories. A recipient of the Young Artist award, he has worked in the media industry for more than 20 years. He holds a master's degree in creative writing and currently teaches journalism at the University of Newcastle and Murdoch University.



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ANG THING YUE
GRABFOOD'S TOP RIDER
IS 62 YEARS OLD **B2**

Percival back in S'pore, 77 years after surrender

Lt-Gen's son visits WWII bunker where his father made decision to give up the fight with Japan

Vanessa Liu

Almost 77 years since the commander of the Allied Forces defending Malaya and Singapore – Lieutenant-General Arthur Ernest Percival – surrendered Singapore to the Japanese, his son, retired brigadier James Percival, returned to the Battlebox on Monday.

The former British underground command centre was where the momentous decision was made on Feb 15, 1942.

Mr Percival, 81, was accompanied by his wife Ann, 75, as well as his daughter and son-in-law, on a personal visit to the historical site built in 1936 and located 9m under Fort



Retired brigadier James Percival at the Battlebox in Fort Canning on Monday where his father, Lieutenant-General Arthur Ernest Percival, commander of the Allied Forces defending Malaya and Singapore, decided to surrender to the Japanese on Feb 15, 1942. He is standing next to wax figures including that of his father (far right, standing). ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Canning Hill.

He was given a guided tour of the place by staff from Singapore History Consultants (SHC), a private heritage consultancy which manages the Battlebox, as well as its di-

rector Jeya Ayadurai.

The 75-minute tour, titled The Battlebox Tour: A Story Of Strategy And Surrender, details the primary reasons for Malaya and Singapore's fall to the Japanese, as well

as the roles and functions the various key rooms in the Battlebox played in the war.

Mr Percival, who last visited the bunker more than 20 years ago, said: "My memory of (the under-

ground bunker) was that you got the idea of being on the ground then, but it hadn't been developed nearly as much as it is now.

[MORE IMPARTIAL continued on B2](#)



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Seniors hit the road for food-delivery companies

There are now about 300 delivery riders aged 60 and above – and their numbers are rising

Janice Tai

The doorbell rings. Instead of a young man juggling bags of food in one hand and a smartphone in the other, a grey-haired deliveryman could be at the door.

There are about 300 delivery riders aged 60 and above who hit the road to send food to hungry customers, according to major food-delivery companies in Singapore.

This small but growing group of seniors makes up 1 per cent to 2 per cent of the companies' delivery fleet. These seniors are finding a new lease of life, riding motorbikes or electric scooters to deliver food to stay active and augment their retirement income.

"The numbers are very small but there are elderly persons who want and need to supplement their income, and the rise of the sharing economy can mean more freelancing job opportunities for seniors," said Nee Soon GRC MP Henry Kwek, who is a member of the People's Action Party Seniors Group.

"The issue is access to these roles. More can be done to strengthen their digital literacy, either by offering specific courses to seniors on how they can use such mobile apps more effectively or Workforce Singapore can perhaps work with seniors to tap the availability of such jobs."

Some riders say the job gives them the independence and flexibility to earn extra pocket money on their own schedule.

Others say older people are taking on jobs as independent contractors without any benefits because they may have a harder time finding full-time employment, given their age.

"There are similar trends in the United States, where older workers are being actively recruited for low-skill service jobs," said Nominated MP and labour economist Walter Theseira.

"These gig jobs are easy to get into, compared with say, security or other service jobs where you face more requirements. However, the lack of benefits and particularly insurance is a real issue."

Like many developed cities, Singapore faces the challenges of a rapidly ageing population.

By 2030, the gap between the young and old in Singapore is expected to widen considerably – the percentage of seniors will rise to 27 per cent and that of youth will fall to 10.8 per cent.

Singapore has around 500,000 people aged 65 and older, and the number is expected to almost double to about 900,000 by 2030.

At Deliveroo Singapore, 111 out of its pool of 6,000 riders are aged 60 and above.

Deliveroo Singapore general manager Siddharth Shanker said the job typically attracts a younger demographic of students who enjoy the flexible hours and the chance to explore different parts of Singapore.

Foodpanda said about 1 per cent, or 60, of its more than 6,000 riders are 60 years old and above.

GrabFood declined to disclose its overall fleet number but said it has about 100 delivery partners who are aged 60 and above.

Most of these older delivery staff use motorbikes and scooters but there are those who drive, too.

A third of the senior delivery riders at Deliveroo use bicycles, and a quarter of those at GrabFood cycle or walk to deliver food. About one in five of the older delivery staff at GrabFood drives to make the deliveries.

"As food delivery can be quite a physical job and may require tasks such as carrying orders and climbing up and down stairs, it might dissuade more seniors from taking up the job," said Mr Luc Andreani, managing director of Foodpanda Singapore.

All three food-delivery companies say they do not have an upper age limit for their delivery staff as older people should have access to flexible work, regardless of age.

"As long as they are physically fit, are responsible road users and acutely aware of road-safety regulations, they will be able to join the fleet," said Mr Andreani.

Regular users of food-delivery services say they do not have concerns about older people delivering their food, as long as these delivery staff are safe on the roads and the delivery time for orders is not compromised.

"I have encountered a few older people who delivered my food and there were no issues," said Mr Joel Li, 37, who works at a non-profit organisation.

"As long as the rider informs me that he may take a little longer, which was what a disabled guy previously did, I am fine with waiting as long as it does not go beyond 15 minutes from the estimated delivery time."

Ms Deborah Li, 33, who is in marketing communications and makes food-delivery orders at least four times a week, said her only concern with elderly riders is whether they are safe on the roads, especially during the peak-hour rush.

But Foodpanda said it does not see a significant difference in the number of accidents involving its senior riders and those involving younger ones.

Deliveroo, GrabFood and Foodpanda have their own training and road-safety programme for their riders.

Deliveroo's Mr Shanker said it recently implemented an accident-and-injury insurance scheme for its delivery riders for free. In the event of an accident, all its riders' personal medical expenses are covered.

GrabFood has also made personal accident insurance free for its delivery partners. At Foodpanda, insurance is not free, but riders can sign up for packages from its insurance partners at preferential rates.



Mr Ang Thing Yue cycles 60km to 100km daily, chalking up about 10 food deliveries a day. He lives in a shophouse in Ceylon Road and delivers food to areas such as Marine Parade, Bedok, Toa Payoh, Potong Pasir and Boon Keng. ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

GrabFood's top rider, 62, delivered 3,000 meals in May-Dec 2018

Every day, Mr Ang Thing Yue would ride his trusty green mountain bike, complete with a customised metal rack at the back where a food bag sits snugly.

The 62-year-old cycles 60km to 100km daily, Mondays to Sundays, chalking up about 10 food deliveries a day. He delivered almost 3,000 food orders from May to December last year, making him the GrabFood rider who completed the most number of deliveries on bicycle last year.

The metal rack behind his bicycle seat is where he used to put the bread loaves sold at his minimart in a shophouse in Ceylon Road. The rack, like Mr Ang, has been given a second lease of life.

"My minimart can't compete with NTUC (FairPrice) so I closed

it down. Just nice, the bread rack fits my bicycle and the food-delivery bag," said Mr Ang, a former sailor who had also operated coffee shops previously.

For many years, Mr Ang had difficulty finding a job because he has only O-level qualifications.

Two years ago, the avid cyclist was riding along his usual route from Changi Coast Road to East Coast Park when a young cyclist suggested that he get paid while cycling by doing food delivery.

Mr Ang had not heard of such a service before and immediately signed up to be a delivery rider with Uber Eats.

Uber was later acquired by Grab and its food-delivery service is now known as GrabFood.

Rain or shine, apart from heavy downpours, one is likely to find Mr Ang cycling in areas such as Marine Parade, Bedok, Toa Payoh, Potong Pasir and Boon Keng, as these places are not too far from

where he lives in Ceylon Road.

He has been doing this, day in, day out, for two years now, because he enjoys being able to earn money while exercising. He said he earns about \$2,000 a month.

"I like the freedom. There is nobody to control me. If I don't want to work, I just log off from the app instead of needing to apply for a day off," said Mr Ang.

"I also can take my money instantly instead of waiting till the end of the month. I do it every week," he added.

Yet, the realities of keeping up with the cost of living here means he has to put in long hours daily.

"I try to rest but I can't afford to do fewer hours. I have to pay my rent and bills," said Mr Ang. He lives in a shophouse in Ceylon Road with his wife, a part-time cashier, and their daughter.

Though the work can be tiring, Mr Ang appreciates the kindness of the food merchants that he vis-

its to pick up the food. They never fail to offer to top up his water bottle. He gets it filled up about three times a day.

Sometimes, he falls down and gets minor cuts on his hands and legs. However, he has not had any major accidents so far.

He said most of his deliveries are on time or earlier than the estimated time. And he has his meals wherever his work takes him.

"In the areas that I cover, McDonald's is popular with the youngsters, families like the Indian vegetarian food and everybody loves cakes," said Mr Ang, who often gets greeted by customers as he makes his way around.

"They call me 'uncle' here, 'uncle' there. I ask them, 'Am I very old?'" he said with a laugh.

"I will do this as long as I can, till my legs or my health stops me."

Janice Tai

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Mr Shanker said there is no correlation between a delivery rider's age and the speed of his deliveries, while GrabFood said there is no difference in the number of deliveries completed by senior riders and those in other age groups.

One of GrabFood's top delivery riders is Mr Ang Thing Yue, 62, who completed the most number of deliveries on bicycle last year (see other report.)

Mr Tan Choon Hoe, 64, a former dispatch rider at a company that offers courier services, joined Foodpanda last year. He said he now earns about \$2,000 a month, a few hundred dollars more than before.

"We were paid according to assignments and the number of as-

signments had been dropping due to online competition," said Mr Tan of his former dispatch job.

A friend told him about Foodpanda and he joined it shortly after.

Mr Tan delivers food around the Central Business District three to four days a week on his motorbike. He works five to six hours a day.

He likes the job as it is more re-

laxed and his schedule is flexible so he can spend more time with his grandchildren.

"It took me just five minutes to learn how to use the food delivery app," said Mr Tan. "It is not difficult. Where there is a will, there is a way, so we shouldn't stop learning."

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Better and fairer portrayal of events: Lt-Gen Percival's son

FROM B1

"The portrayal of the campaign is infinitely better now than it was when I was here before. It's totally different. It's more comprehensive and I think it's a fairer assessment of what went on than it had been before."

SHC took over the management of Battlebox in 2013. It was re-opened in February 2016 after efforts to resolve maintenance and structural issues with the site.

Mr Ayadurai said: "When we took on the task of reorganising the Bat-

tlebox, the intent was to be as impartial as possible and let history do the talking, and ensure that Singaporeans get a truer appreciation regarding the incidents that led to the fall of Singapore.

"As a young country, we are now getting to appreciate that history, and to have General Percival's son come here on the tour and say that he felt that this was an impartial history – it was really good hearing that from him."

The Percivals' visit to the underground bunker coincided with the Singapore Bicentennial, the 200th



Lieutenant-General Arthur Ernest Percival (right) and other British officers on the way to Ford Factory in Bukit Timah on Feb 15, 1942, to surrender, marking the start of the Japanese Occupation. PHOTO: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE

anniversary of Sir Stamford Raffles' landing in Singapore.

Mr Percival said that upon hearing that he and his wife were coming back to Singapore, his daughter and her husband decided that they would join them.

He said of his father, who died in 1966: "I've always been sad, throughout my life, that my father had to bear all the brunt of the surrender. When an event like this takes place, it's human nature that someone has got to be responsible for that."

"It's easy to say that General Percival was responsible for the surrender of Malaya and Singapore. He wasn't. There were very many factors that led to the surrender of Singapore. And he was a scapegoat."

Entrance into the Battlebox is through guided tours only. For more information, visit the official Battlebox website at www.battlebox.com.sg

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No stage exit for these seniors

Retirement is an opportunity to kick-start personal passions for members of Ageless Theatre

Rahimah Rashith

Almost 20 years after retiring from her job as a primary school teacher, Mrs Charan Singh remains as busy as ever, running marathons, climbing mountains, volunteering and acting.

For the past three months, the 79-year-old has been at Marine Parade Community Club twice a week – for two hours each time – rehearsing for an upcoming theatre production.

She is part of an acting troupe called Ageless Theatre, which she joined in 2012. It is a non-profit interest group managed and run almost entirely by seniors from all over Singapore.

Since its inception in 2011, the group has written, directed and performed in seven major productions in various locations, including The Arts House and Gateway Theatre's Black Box.

"Being part of a theatre group is a dream come true for me. Since I was young, I have been quite interested in being on stage and performing plays," said Mrs Singh.

"But I came from a very strict family with old-fashioned values, so I could not pursue it. It was only after my retirement that I got to try my hand at acting."

Ageless Theatre is made up of mostly semi-retirees and retirees in their 50s and 60s. The oldest member is aged 82. The group started accepting younger talents last year, with the youngest recruit now being a 30-year-old.

From scriptwriting to acting and directing, the 25-strong team handles everything that a regular theatre group does. For many of its members, the group is also a source of companionship.

"All of us love to act and be on stage," said group chairman June Goh. The semi-retiree, who is also a coordinator at pro-family initiative Family Matters, added: "We are like a family. We help one another improve and memorise scripts and we motivate ourselves. We share our stories with one another."

The 61-year-old said members have a WhatsApp chat group which they use to organise activities and keep one another updated about the theatre group's progress.

The oldest member, Madam Tan Ah Moi, 82, does not speak English, but that does not stop her from joining in the sessions.

Since 2011, the housewife has been playing various roles onstage, some involving the Hokkien dialect which she is fluent in. "I started theatre in my 70s. Here, I am always learning new theatre skills," she said. "Memorising scripts helps keep my mind active. Many of us



Members in action in a play. From scriptwriting to acting and directing, the 25-strong team handles everything a regular theatre group does. ST FILE PHOTO

are old but we do not have dementia; we keep our minds active."

She added: "Many times I have thought that I might want to step back because of my age, but when I think of the friends I have made here, it keeps me going."

Ageless Theatre makes it a point to weave messages that address social issues concerning elderly people into its plays. These include topics such as loneliness and isolation, as well as seniors finding love in their twilight years. In 2017, the group put together a play called Surrender that encouraged the elderly to pursue their dreams regardless of age or circumstance.

Theatre veteran Yeo Hon Beng,

45, artistic director for the group, said the members incorporate their experiences and life stories into the plays. "In one of our rehearsals, we talked about marriages. The members revealed their ups and downs and how they came out better. During the rehearsals, they shared their vulnerability. We incorporated their experiences into the show."

The group's upcoming production this year is an adaptation of Romeo And Juliet, with the protagonists reimagined as seniors.

Ms Goh said the group wants to pose the question: Can old people fall in love?

"We decided to adapt Romeo And Juliet into a silver romance because

we are all seniors," she said. "We wanted to explore: If grandparents or parents got married, would their children object?"

Outside of the rehearsal room at Marine Parade Community Club, the group takes on social missions in its free time. Members conduct theatre sessions for seniors, with games involved.

Since 2017, the group has been performing and engaging seniors at St Luke's ElderCare Ayer Rajah Centre twice a month. Theatre games which include simple acting lines and actions are played.

Mr Yeo, who has been in the theatre and film industry for 20 years, said managing a group of seniors has been inspiring and that the members are like parents and siblings to him. "I get very inspired by their energy and attitude in life. There is a lot of life experience and kinship in this group," he said.

"I have a lot to learn from them and the kind of attitude they have in living life to the fullest," added Mr Yeo, who teaches drama in schools as well.

For the members of Ageless Theatre, retirement from work is just an opportunity to kick-start their personal passions.

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• Ageless Theatre's upcoming production *It's Not Romeo And Juliet* will be held at Marine Parade Community Club from March 15 to 17. To find out more, go to <https://www.facebook.com/agelesstheatre>

Ageless Theatre members Laurence Pang, Debbie Lee (in green) and Lesley Ong rehearsing a play at Marine Parade Community Club last week. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

POST-RETIREMENT START

Since I was young, I have been quite interested in being on stage and performing plays. But I came from a very strict family with old-fashioned values, so I could not pursue it. It was only after my retirement that I got to try my hand at acting.



MRS CHARAN SINGH, 79, who joined acting troupe Ageless Theatre in 2012.

KEEPING THE MIND ACTIVE

Here, I am always learning new theatre skills. Memorising scripts helps keep my mind active. Many of us are old but we do not have dementia; we keep our minds active.



MADAM TAN AH MOI, 82, who has been playing various roles onstage since 2011.

Online gambling's bigger threat warrants harsher penalty: Judge

K. C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

A judge who sentenced an offender to 14 months' jail for providing a remote gambling service, and added four weeks more for using an office as a common gaming house, made clear that the sentencing disparity between the two offences was justified, given the greater threat online.

District Judge Kenneth Yap noted that both offences were similar in nature, separated by being on "opposite sides of the digital divide".

"There are greater grounds for a stiffer deterrent policy against online gaming, given its pervasiveness and difficulty of detection," said District Judge Kenneth Yap in judgment grounds last month.

"Taken as a whole, the circumstances of the accused's offending under the Remote Gambling Act presented a far greater threat to society than his actions in relation to the Common Gaming Houses Act charge," he added.

Elger Kua, 38, had pleaded guilty to using his Midview City office unit in Sin Ming Lane for gambling in the Texas Hold'em game of chance between December 2015 and Janu-

ary 2017. Kua, a Canadian national who grew up here, admitted to a second charge of facilitating others to participate in unauthorised Singapore-based remote gambling between Jan 8 and Jan 14, 2017, in an online club he had created on a mobile application.

Kua, whose patrons for the app and office services included lawyers, teachers, IT engineers and business owners, also admitted to a third charge of personally using a remote gambling service, which was taken into consideration.

Kua had created an account on the app in 2016. He later organised a club on the app, which allowed him to invite and approve others to join and play online poker games.

For the period of the charge, the total bet value was \$159,101. He claimed to have made a net monthly profit of about \$10,000.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Tan Hsiao Tien urged a deterrent sentence, pointing out that remote gambling posed a greater concern, as its lucrative operations were transnational and significant in scale. She said that Kua's app-based and office-based operations were large scale.

Arising from a police raid at the Midview unit, 12 punters and two

dealers were charged and fined under the Common Gaming Houses Act, while another dealer was jailed for two weeks and fined \$20,000.

Kua's remote gaming operation was even bigger, with 296 members.

In his mitigation, lawyer Wayne Ong said Kua had intended to engage in a social game rather than earn a profit. He added that Kua neither created nor promoted the app.

District Judge Yap said Parliament provided higher sentencing

MORE PERVASIVE, HARDER TO DETECT

There are greater grounds for a stiffer deterrent policy against online gaming, given its pervasiveness and difficulty of detection.



DISTRICT JUDGE KENNETH YAP

ranges under the Remote Gambling Act, reflecting a "demonstrable need to criminalise all aspects of online gambling activity, and to impose sufficient deterrence to check its growth".

He added that the charge under the Remote Gambling Act "involved some uncharted territory as there was no available precedent involving the relevant quantum of bets facilitated by the accused".

The judge found the scale of Kua's gambling operations, and therefore the potential harm, far greater under the Remote Gambling Act than the Common Gaming Houses Act.

He sentenced Kua to 15 months' jail in total for the two offences, plus a \$40,000 fine or an additional two months in default. Kua, who did not pay the fine, is currently serving a 17-month jail term.

The judge allowed his family to access and extract photographs of his one-year-old child from his phone, which is to be disposed of. It had been confiscated earlier as it was used in the commission of the offences.

"One can hate the sin without hating the sinner," said District Judge Kenneth Yap.

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NOTICE

We wish to inform that with effect from 1 February 2019, **MR. GOH SOCK SIA** of NRIC No. XXXX012/C has left YJ Waterproofing Pte Ltd as an employee and INCO3 Pte Ltd as a Director and he is therefore not authorised to transact any business or collect money on our behalf.

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(From left) Lieutenant Yeo Ren Jie, Major Janice Oh and Captain Amelia Justina Lim are among the 10 or so officers who started out as paramedics in the Singapore Civil Defence Force and later underwent training in firefighting skills. They say having both skills helps them make better decisions on the ground. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

Special SCDF officers can tackle fires and medical emergencies

10 so far trained in both skills as the force aims to have personnel able to handle various situations

Tan Tam Mei

Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) officers are highly regarded for their life-saving skills, with most either specialising in tackling raging blazes or providing emergency ambulance response.

But a small group has now been trained as both paramedics and firefighters, in line with the force's push to have its personnel respond to different kinds of incidents.

There are now around 10 officers who started out as paramedics and were later trained in firefighting.

After their stints in the two areas, many of them went on to work in policy-related roles, making use of knowledge gained on both fronts.

Lieutenant Yeo Ren Jie, 30 – who was a paramedic for six years,

completed his training as a senior fire and rescue officer last year.

Knowing both operations has allowed him to integrate the different skills and is helping him to make decisions on the ground as a rota commander at Yishun Fire Station, a role he took on about a month ago.

Previously, “a clear line was drawn” between fire and medical operations, said Lt Yeo.

“For example, when firefighters extricate a person, the medical side (paramedics) takes over. Now, it's about blending them together.”

For example, in a recent road-traffic incident, he recalls having to free a man trapped in a car.

“Besides managing the process of extricating him, I knew I also had to watch out in case of spinal injuries. That was when I realised that knowing both sides is very important.”

Training as both a paramedic and firefighter has also helped him to better assess the impact each action has on casualties at a scene.

There are now around 10 officers who started out as paramedics and were later trained in firefighting. After their stints in the two areas, many of them went on to work in policy-related roles, making use of knowledge they gained on both fronts.

“All these require split-second decisions. The better you are trained in both fire and medical (skills), the better a decision you can make,” said Lt Yeo.

While the role of a firefighter is generally still perceived as more dangerous than that of a paramedic, Captain Amelia Justina Lim, 37, begs to differ.

“As a firefighter, you're managing a big group and a large incident

scene that can change any time,” said Capt Lim, an emergency medical services (EMS) team leader at the 3rd SCDF Division.

“As a paramedic, your incident scene is smaller because you might focus on one patient, but it's equally dynamic. And in both, you have to rise to the occasion.”

When she began training as a firefighter in 2015, after six years as a paramedic, it took some time to assuage her mother's worries.

“Eventually, she was supportive, but her initial reaction was quite different from when I first told her that I wanted to be a paramedic.”

For Major Janice Oh, 41, making the switch from ambulances to fire engines was an exciting journey, and the nine months of intensive firefighting training was a learning experience, she said.

“I even enjoyed the residential training and things like booking out (leaving for home after staying at camp for a period of time) and getting dirty.”

Maj Oh, the assistant director of the force's EMS Readiness department, was the first paramedic to be “cross-trained” as a firefighter in 2005.

She currently oversees the force's EMS tiered-response framework, which was implemented in 2017, and deploys resources according to the severity of a medical incident.

“Having been at the front line in both roles puts me in a better position to make decisions,” she said.

“The job and the skill set of paramedics and firefighters might be different, but the mission of the SCDF as a life-saving force still remains the same.”

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High roller can now contest casino's \$10m suit

K. C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

The High Court has set aside a \$10 million default judgment against an Australian-Chinese tycoon for alleged casino debts and allowed his appeal to enter his defence and contest the case in a court trial.

Marina Bay Sands (MBS) casino had sued China-born businessman Wang Zhi Cai in the High Court and obtained the default judgment on June 12, 2017, after he failed to appear in court. The casino also obtained a Sydney court order to enforce the Singapore judgment against his assets in Australia.

The Singapore court order provided for the recovery of more than \$13 million, the biggest sum sought by MBS from an Australian casino patron. The amount comprises the casino debt of \$9,996,250, plus interest of \$3,782,690 and costs of \$7,398.

But last week, Justice Chan Seng Onn, after hearing the arguments of lawyers from both sides, took the Singapore court order off the table, allowing an appeal by Mr Wang, 63, to file his defence within 21 days to contest the case.

His lawyers Alfred Lim and Jaime Lye from Fullerton Law Chambers had successfully argued that there were various “triable” issues in the case that justified a full court trial to consider and decide the outcome.

Drew & Napier lawyer Kelvin Tan had successfully objected before the High Court registrar last year to Mr Wang's application to set aside the default judgment, a move that led to the present appeal before Justice Chan.

Mr Wang, a high-net-worth patron, had visited the casino in April 2013 and January 2014 and admitted to losses at the casino, in court papers filed. But he claimed he did not deal directly with the casinos he patronised but through a Beijing-based junket operator who would pay for his losses and collect on his winnings.

At issue in the case to be decided would be the role of any junket operator and others in the payment process – triable issues to establish the facts. Mr Wang, in documents filed, said he was introduced to MBS by his junket operator, who had also previously arranged his patronage to casinos in London and Seoul. He said he failed to appear in court to defend himself within the appropriate time limit in 2016 because he was unaware of the court papers filed by MBS.

MBS had obtained the High Court default judgment after having served the papers by registered post and by posting the same on the front door of Mr Wang's Kirribilli Avenue address in Sydney in May 2017. After obtaining the Singapore judgment, MBS sought to seize his assets in Australia, registering the judgment in a Sydney court, but failed in attempts to serve the court notice personally to Mr Wang at the registered office of his company – TMG International Design – or at its place of business.

Last year, an Australian judge allowed MBS' application to send notice of the Singapore judgment to Mr Wang's known home and business addresses in lieu of serving it to him in person. But further moves to serve papers at his Kirribilli address failed, as did attempts to call him on two given phone numbers in Australia and China.

Mr Wang said he came to know of the default judgment only in June last year, about a year after it was issued, and it was through his personal assistant's e-mail account.

He then took steps to set aside the judgment.

He added that he travelled abroad frequently as a businessman, and that since 2007, he had not been to the Kirribilli Avenue address, which was where the notices were posted and the registered mail was sent to.

Mr Wang, who also resides in Beijing, is expected to file his defence in the High Court this month.

MBS declined to comment when contacted, citing the “ongoing legal proceedings”.

Its spokesman said: “We would, however, like to stress that to date, we have not had any junket arrangements with junket operators, whether based in Singapore or overseas.”

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Singapore tanker seized in Cameroon released

Zhaki Abdullah

A Singapore-flagged oil tanker, which was reported to have been seized by private militiamen in Cameroon last week in an apparent commercial dispute, has been released.

In a statement yesterday, Singapore-based Eastern Pacific Shipping confirmed that the vessel,

named Barents Sea, departed the port of Limbe in Cameroon with all 26 crew members safe and unharmed as of Tuesday.

The vessel was seized by Cameroonian militiamen armed with AK-47 sub-machine guns at the Sonara Refinery in Limbe.

Eastern Pacific Shipping alleged at the time that Mr Jules Francois Famawa, the owner of local charterer DSC Marine, had “used illegiti-

mate means to seize the vessel for the purpose of holding its owners to ransom in clear violation of Cameroonian and international law”.

In its statement, the firm thanked the crew for their “unwavering strength, resilience and professionalism throughout the dreadful encounter”.

It also thanked the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore,

the Republic of Singapore Navy, the various embassies representing the ship's crew – who include Indian, Chinese and Turkish nationals – and the Cameroonian authorities.

“DSC Marine's conduct and blatant disregard for local and international laws have proven to be futile. We sincerely hope that future disagreements can be resolved without resorting to hostile

means,” said Eastern Pacific Shipping.

The firm added that it remains “committed to holding the highest management standards in the maritime industry by complying with all applicable local and international rules and regulations with a priority on the health, safety and security of our crew”.

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E-scooter the cause of home fire that injured three

Ng Huiwen

A fire that broke out in a Cashew Road flat on Monday night, injuring three people, started from an electric scooter that had been placed in one of the bedrooms.

The Singapore Civil Defence

Force (SCDF) released preliminary investigation findings on the fire at Block 132 Cashew Road, in Bukit Panjang, in an update on its Facebook page on Tuesday.

Three people were taken to hospital and about 100 residents evacuated after the fire broke out in the sixth-floor unit around 8.45pm.

Firefighters put out the blaze in about 15 minutes, using a water jet and three compressed air foam backpacks.

On Tuesday, the SCDF said the three victims were living in the affected unit and are healing from their burn injuries.

The trio had been evacuated

from the smoke-logged flat, along with six others, before the SCDF's arrival. They were later taken to the Singapore General Hospital.

About 100 residents living between the fifth and eighth storeys were also evacuated by the police.

In its Facebook update on Tuesday, the SCDF reminded the public

to take preventive measures against e-scooter fires. These include placing the batteries on hard, flat surfaces when charging to allow optimal dissipation of heat, and placing the batteries away from combustible materials.

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Dr Su Su, a consultant in geriatric medicine at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, with her patient, retired pianist and saxophone player Cheung Tat On, who underwent hip-fracture surgery last June. Mr Cheung said his treatment, from his arrival at the hospital to surgery, was very fast. He was back on his feet 10 days after the operation. ST PHOTO: KHALID BABA

Earlier treatment for patients with hip fractures

Streamlining of processes at KTPH and Yishun Community Hospital cuts waiting time for patients

Felicia Choo

Singapore has the highest rate of hip fractures in Asia, but two hospitals here are making sure that patients who suffer from them are being treated earlier.

Since streamlining processes in 2017, the number of patients admit-

ted to a ward within four hours of their arrival at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital's (KTPH) emergency department has jumped threefold, while the waiting time for those transferred to the adjoining Yishun Community Hospital (YCH) has been cut by a third.

With hip-fracture rates continuing to rise here, these improve-

ments are crucial.

The condition is most common in elderly patients who have osteoporosis.

Since the 1960s, hip-fracture rates here have increased 1½ times for men and five times for women – 152 per 100,000 men and 402 per 100,000 women have had a hip fracture.

In confronting this problem, KTPH and YCH medical staff wanted to better coordinate care for hip-fracture patients, who usually have multiple underlying medical conditions.

Together, they came up with a hip-fracture protocol two years ago that has since benefited 900 patients.

Last year, 60 per cent of the roughly 350 hip-fracture patients seen at KTPH each year were admitted to a ward within four hours, up from 17 per cent in 2015.

More patients are also getting a faster transfer to YCH, with more than 80 per cent of patients last year transferred there within a day, down from an average of 3½ days in 2015.

In addition, the incidence of surgical site infections dropped to zero last year, down from 2.3 per cent in 2015.

“A hip fracture is the most common serious accidental injury that afflicts the elderly after a simple fall,” said Dr Jagadish Mallya, who chairs the Yishun Health Hip Fracture Service, which is responsible for the streamlining.

Around 20 per cent of people older than 60 here would suffer a fall, and 1 per cent to 2 per cent of these falls would result in a hip fracture, he added.

Admission within four hours is an international benchmark, while a prolonged stay in an accident and emergency department can lead to pressure sores, delirium and an increased risk of complications, according to Dr Jagadish, who is also a senior consultant at KTPH's Department of Geriatric Medicine.

In addition, delay in surgery has been associated with an increased risk of complications, functional decline and an increased length of hospital stay and cost for the patient.

Moving patients to the community hospital earlier also helps to promote independence and improve functional outcomes for patients.

Retired pianist and saxophone player Cheung Tat On, 81, who underwent hip-fracture surgery at KTPH last June, said: “The whole process was very fast once I arrived at the hospital. The doctor came to see me and I had an X-ray done.”

He had surgery the next day and was back on his feet 10 days later.

About 2,500 hip-fracture cases occur here every year and this figure is projected to increase to 9,000 cases in 2050 due to Singapore's increasing elderly population.

The total immediate hospital cost of these fractures was \$14 million in 1998 and is estimated to rise to \$112 million by 2050.

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PHOTOS: SPHERE EXHIBITS

Flavours of Sicily

Chef-owner Lino Sauro of Gattopardo pulls out all the stops for an exclusive dining experience

Treat yourself to an authentic gastronomic experience at the acclaimed Gattopardo Ristorante di Mare.

As part of the Gusto Italiano series that highlights a different restaurant every month, guests can savour a specially crafted six-course menu by chef-owner Lino Sauro (below).

Paired with elegant and intensely aromatic Tuscan wines from Frescobaldi, the delectable Sicilian specialities will include Tortino di Sgombro (mackerel poached in extra virgin olive oil, cabbage and spicy mussels), Palermitana (herb-breaded and grilled veal cutlet), and traditional Sicilian dessert Coffee Granita.

Born in Sicily to a family of farmers, Chef Lino grew up making fresh ricotta cheese, and tending to his fields of crops and animals. Chef Lino began honing his culinary skills at the age of 15, in top establishments around the world. In 2010, he settled in Singapore and started Gattopardo. He has also been invited to share

his style of Sicilian cuisine at various food festivals in Taiwan, Kuala Lumpur and Ubud, and was awarded the “Chef's Choice” title at the World Gourmet Summit Awards of Excellence in 2016.

HSBC cardholders enjoy 20 per cent off all Gusto Italiano events. Throughout the year, they also enjoy 15 per cent off a la carte food bills at monthly participating restaurants. Menu and pairing details are accurate as at time of print and subject to changes.



GUSTO ITALIANO

When: Feb 21

Where: Gattopardo Ristorante di Mare, 34 Tras Street

Admission: \$128.80++ (HSBC cardholders), \$161++ (Other payment modes)

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askST@NLB
you ask,
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come listen

Travel tips

The United States is a diverse country worth exploring — it has everything from exciting cities to beautiful nature spots, and everything else in between. Get a heads-up on where to go at February's askST@NLB. The Straits Times' travel writer Lee Siew Hua and Destination America president and chief executive officer Richard Lauder will share what's trending in the country and why the Americas appeal to travellers.

askST@NLB will be held on Feb 15 at the Central Public Library Programme Zone, 100 Victoria Street.

Visit str.sg/askSiewHua3 for more details.



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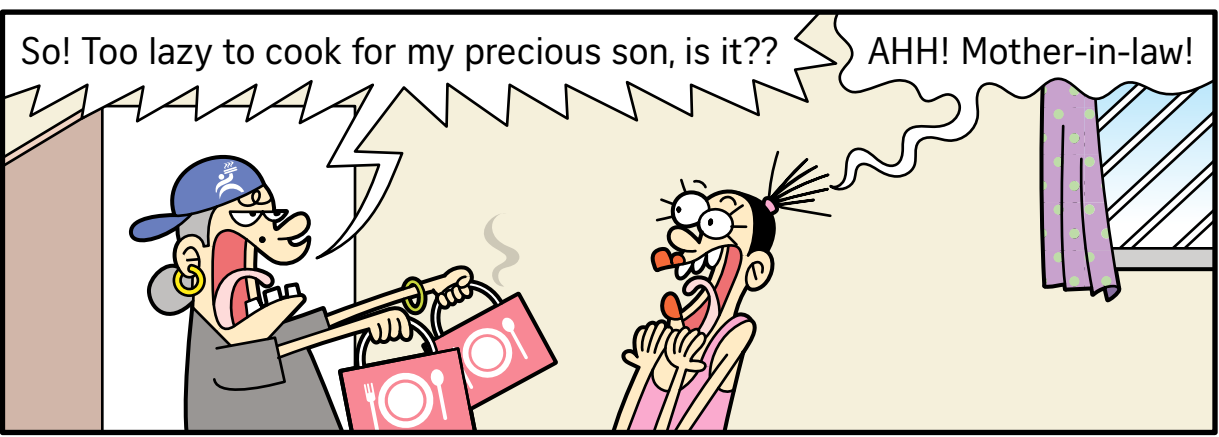
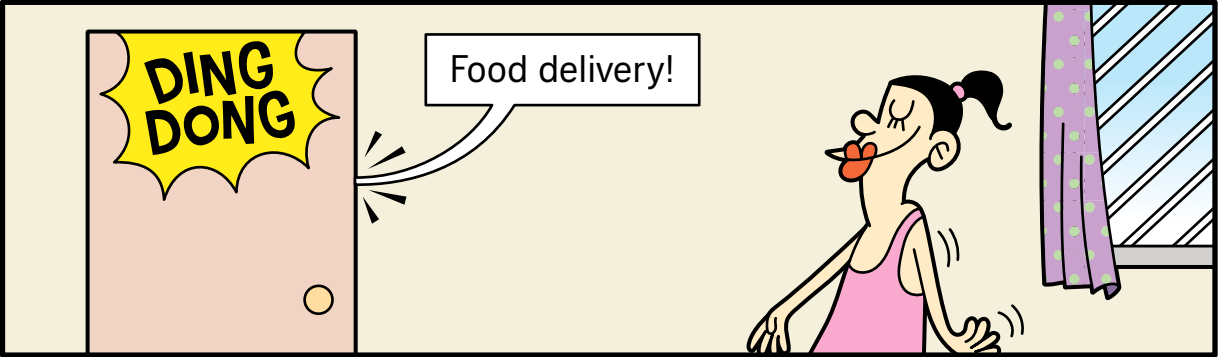
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FORUM

deedhan's TAKE

More seniors freelancing as deliverymen



S'pore culture as rojak as one wishes it to be

Journalist Toh Wen Li asked: "What's so bad about feeling proud to be Chinese while thinking in English?" (Celebrating family, not Chinese-ness, in the new year; Feb 3).

Singapore is not a cultural melting pot, though some would impose on it the American social milieu.

True to our heritage, Singapore culture and Singaporeans are as rojak as one wishes them to be.

So, why would someone so articulate in English, a language inherited from our colonial masters, be so concerned about it interfering with her ethnic identity?

Any time we belittle our distinctive culture as being less than pristine, such as when people insist on others speaking proper English and not Singlish, we detract from it.

Language proficiency need not be at the expense of cultural idiosyncrasies. Both can exist comfortably in a true-blooded native.

The collective consciousness is distinctive in so far as the individuals are certain of their identities.

Thomas Lee Hock Seng (Dr)

Cultural diversity key to strong national fabric

Former foreign minister George Yeo championed for us to stay true to our cultural genome because that is a powerful inheritance from the past which will in fact secure our future (The US-China Cold Peace and Singapore's cultural DNA; Feb 4).

I would add that at the Singapore Perspectives 2019 conference, he also shared that when granting pink NRICs and citizenship certificates upon new citizens during his time as minister, he would counsel them not to cut off their ties to their countries of birth, as those ties are an asset to Singapore.

I find that unconventional, enlightening and certainly something worth highlighting.

While most of us are aware of immigration as an economy-boosting strategy, we tend to overlook the richness immigrants add to our cultural diversity, and the value brought by their connections to, and understanding of, their former countries.

Imagine a Singaporean company that is contemplating an expansion to Sri Lanka; who better to add to its team than a Sri Lankan immigrant who is already well versed in the target country in terms of local language, cultural idiosyncrasies, geographical knowledge and bureaucratic navigation?

By proactively managing immigration, keeping up infrastructural development and maintaining social harmony all the same, the story of Singapore's immigration success is one to be continued from our early pioneers to future generations as our social, economic and national fabric continues to be woven and strengthened by interlacing magnificently diverse cultural groups from thread to thread.

Lily Ong (Madam)

Red packets often given as a show of thanks

It is puzzling why workers who accept gifts in cash or red packets from bereaved families at the Mandai Crematorium warrant investigation by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (Workers at crematorium in trouble over red packets; Feb 2).

Handling funerals and cremation services is not something many would like to do, and such jobs are of the lowest preference for many people. Some consider such jobs inauspicious.

So it is natural and culturally acceptable for families to express their thanks – and some believe as a gesture to dispel any bad luck – to the workers by giving them gifts of cash or red packets. It is a common practice that has gone on for awhile – equivalent to giving a tip for good service.

After all, how much do these workers earn? How many funerals can they handle a day? Can giving them such gifts really lead to favours of faster cremation or better funeral services in the future for the same family? What kind of inappropriate or illegal benefits can these workers get out of a few dollars in gifts?

To assume acceptance of such gifts as corrupt or criminal does not make sense.

In our society, many are struggling to earn a living. There are many more in the community doing lowly jobs. Many elderly folk are cleaning tables, washing toilets, working in the sun and rain for enough money to feed themselves and their families. Is it wrong for them to accept tips? Will the public get into trouble with the law for giving such tips and gifts?

Let us not misinterpret actions that are merely gestures of thanks and appreciation. Such actions happen daily and in many places because people have a sense of gratitude and compassion towards those who provide needed services and do a job that many others would rather not do.

Ho Ting Fei (Dr)

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Support innovation in fight against plastic

The economic perspective in terms of cost and benefits of the push to reduce the use of single-use plastics, as well as the need to be objective, has been well addressed (The plastic poser for Singapore; Feb 2).

But this does not fully illustrate the urgency of the challenge facing the planet today, particularly for humans and marine life.

Speedy action, beyond objective cost-benefit analyses, is required because the environmental cost of plastic worldwide is huge. Less than

a fifth of all plastic gets recycled globally, with the remainder being burned or discarded.

Photographer Chris Jordan in a TEDx talk describes how animal species like the albatross are feeding their young with plastic found floating on the ocean, suffocating and dying as a result.

Traces of plastic are also creeping into the food chain and hence the human diet. Long-term effects such as these may not be effectively factored in when it comes to cost-benefit analyses.

We need to think out of the box to solve this man-made issue. Scientists have engineered an enzyme that is able to digest a common form of plastic (Plastic-eating enzyme holds promise in fighting pollution; British, US scientists, ST Online; April 17, 2018). This drastically reduces the time needed for the plastic to break down, and has yet to be commercialised.

We should focus our efforts on such solutions to plastic waste so as to move from a linear plastic

economy to a circular one, significantly reducing the production of new plastic.

While not an alternative to replacing plastic with biodegradable substitutes, it would still help to reduce the scale of the current problem.

Increase funding and support start-ups with the goal of finding new ideas to solve the plastic problem. There needs to be greater urgency and focus in supporting innovation.

Prakash Natarajan

Speedy action, beyond objective cost-benefit analyses, is required because the environmental cost of plastic worldwide is huge.

Pharmacists play vital role in medication counselling

The separation of prescribing and dispensing of medicines is already well established in hospitals and polyclinics in Singapore.

Benefits from this system include rational drug use to ensure appropriate use of medicines at the right dosage, counter-checking for drug allergy, drug-drug interactions and contraindications (Tap pharmacist to explain side effects; Feb 1).

In this aspect, pharmacists can indeed serve as an important resource for team-based care, where we play a vital role in medication counselling, informing patients of potential side effects and its management.

Such collaboration will facilitate a more informed decision-making process for patients while allowing doctors to focus on diagnosis and treatment.

The approach can also be extended to informed consent required for certain procedures and therapies involving pre- and post-medications or specific advice on medication management, such as perioperative anticoagulation.

While exploring greater engagement with pharmacists, especially in the private setting, can help strengthen the process of providing pertinent medication-related information to patients, it is important for the Ministry of Health (MOH) to provide clear guidance on the extent of informed consent for low-risk medications or medical procedures if the modified Montgomery Test is to be applied.

A clear directive and stand from MOH will allow for a more calibrated approach to the informed consent process; balancing information overload and the creation of unnecessary anxiety in patients who may not be equipped to appreciate the risk versus benefits of treatment and what is clinically important for patients to know.

Irene Quay (Ms)
President
Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore

Bouquets

Precious insight into Singapore history

Kudos to the National Library Board (NLB) for acquiring a rare publication of the Sejarah Melayu, or Malay Annals (Rare book on early S'pore stories back in Republic; Jan 23).

The original text is written in Jawi by Munsyi Abdullah. A romanised Malay edition by William Shellabear and Chinese translated version by Hsu Yun Tsiao in 1946 are translated versions that we know of.

The NLB should consider translating the text into English to reach a wider audience.

The importance of the Sejarah Melayu is its insight into the early history of Singapore, which

would make it a worthwhile endeavour.

Chin Kee Thou

Happy memories of kind S'poreans

While in Chinatown during our recent trip to Singapore, my wife tripped and fell face first onto the pavement.

She could not be moved due to a heavy nose bleed and excruciating pain, but a crowd of helpers formed very quickly and one of them called for an ambulance.

While waiting for the ambulance to arrive, one of the helpers stood behind my wife and

shielded her against the sun with an umbrella, another bought us bottles of cold water, and yet another handed us handfuls of tissues to staunch the blood.

We were overcome by the kindness and offers of help, and were also touched by the reaction of the hotel staff when we returned from the hospital.

Due to my wife's injuries, we were advised not to embark on the cruise we were due to take the next day.

Yet despite our sadness at having to cancel the cruise, we have happy memories of the people of Singapore.

Brian Lewy

TV contestants exposed their ignorance

Chinese cuisine has been widely praised by the world's finest gourmets. So the reactions of contestants on reality TV show The Bachelor simply exposed their ignorance of what constitutes epicurean delights (US dating show pans Singapore food; Jan 31).

With Malay, Indian and Peranakan influences, Singaporean dining, even for the masses, carries gradations that only a finely tuned palate can discern and appreciate.

Ketchup and chilli sauce on well-done steaks, fish and chips and broiled vegetables heaped together with lumps of buttered corn are all fine and good for the sheltered Westerner, but don't let ignorance expose an utter lack of worldliness.

Yik Keng Yeong (Dr)

FORUM ONLINE

DELANE LIM ZI XUAN: No need to shame Gojek passenger.

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Efforts to uplift security officers ongoing

We thank Mr Seah Yam Meng (Revise all industry standards for security officers; Jan 22), Mr Kwan Jin Yao (Do more to find out plight of security officers; Jan 22) and Mr Sean Lim Wei Xin (Penalty regime for security officers overly harsh; Jan 23) for their feedback.

On Jan 1, the Ministry of Home Affairs introduced several changes to the code of conduct for private

security officers, with the aim of better calibrating the range of penalties to be commensurate with varying degrees of misconduct.

We must take such misconduct seriously because they could lead to security lapses that compromise lives, and not only properties.

First-time offenders will generally be given only warnings, as was the practice previously.

However, with the changes, the police now have the option of imposing a composition fine if a security officer repeatedly or in egregious fashion breaches the code of conduct.

Before the changes, the police had only the options of suspending or revoking a security officer's licence. This would have been a worse outcome for the security officer.

Penalties such as licence suspension or revocation, or even prosecution, are considered only for the most

severe or recalcitrant cases.

We recognise that greater professional expectations for the security industry must be complemented with better pay and working conditions, and upgraded skills.

This was why MHA worked with tripartite partners to develop the Security Industry Transformation Map and the Progressive Wage Model for the industry.

In particular, to address the long working hours of security officers,

the overtime exemption for the security industry will be removed from January 2021, and wages for security officers will increase by at least 3 per cent per year, up to 2024.

We will continue to find ways to strengthen the security industry and uplift our security officers.

Goh Chour Thong
Director
Media Relations
Community Partnership and Communications Group
Ministry of Home Affairs

ST

wine

our best picks

Wines to go with CNY dishes

Here are ST Wine's top 10 picks and the food to pair them with



Deep Wood Estate Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside 2016

Country: Australia

Usual price: \$75

ST Wine price: **\$66**

Food pairing: Braised noodle, bak kwa and nian gao



Salvalai Monile Ripasso Corvina 2014

Country: Italy

Usual price: \$70

ST Wine price: **\$55**

Food pairing: Pan-fried beef, barbecued red meats and dumplings



Isabel Estate Pinot Noir 2016

Country: New Zealand

Usual price: \$75

ST Wine price: **\$66**

Food pairing: Roasted duck and fish dishes



Koyle Royal Syrah 2009

Country: Chile

Usual price: \$60

ST Wine price: **\$52**

Food pairing: Roasted and grilled meat, curry



Tenuta Di Corte Giacobbe Suove 2017

Country: Italy

Usual price: \$45

ST Wine price: **\$38**

Food pairing: Lobster, grilled fish, abalone, smoked salmon lo hei and other seafood



Chateau La Mauleone, Lalande De Pomerol 2013

Country: France

Usual price: \$50

ST Wine price: **\$43**

Rating: RP 92 points

Food pairing: Buddha jumps over the wall, pen cai, braised and other stewed dishes



Montes Limited Cabernet Sauvignon Carmenere 2016

Country: Chile

Usual price: \$43

ST Wine price: **\$39**

Rating: JS 91points

Food pairing: Roasted meats, preserved meats



Kalleske Clarry's Grenache-shiraz-mataro 2017

Country: Australia

Usual price: \$55

ST Wine price: **\$49**

Food pairing: Peking duck and roasted suckling pig



Kaiken Terroir Series Torrontes 2016

Country: Argentina

Usual price: \$39

ST Wine price: **\$33**

Food pairing: Teochew-Cantonese style steamed fish, steamboat and chicken dishes



Koyle Auma 2013

Country: Chile

Usual price: \$180

ST Wine price: **\$168**

Rating: RP 93 Points

Food pairing: Roasted meats, roasted pork, bak kwa, lasagna, cold cuts

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ST PHOTO: ALI YUSOFF

Bustle of old Toa Payoh

Some of the flats in Lorong 5, Toa Payoh, one of Singapore's oldest housing estates, on April 2, 1969. Itinerant stalls hawking various foods are seen on the roadside.

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MAS named central bank of the year

London-based journal cites its fintech efforts, and consistency in monetary policy and supervision

Rei Kurohi

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) has been named central bank of the year, it was announced yesterday. The award from London-based journal Central Banking recognises best practices in policy, governance, economics and management.

Editor-in-chief and award committee chairman Christopher Jeffery said in a press statement: "Singapore's central bank stands out for its pioneering fintech efforts combined with its consistency of performance in monetary policy, financial stability and supervision."

"The MAS has proven itself to be a well-structured and agile institution capable of introducing joined-up rule-making while embracing technological change, all the while seeking to maintain a focus on prudent oversight of financial institutions – for which it has a strong track record."

The journal noted that MAS has displayed an enviable track record for monetary and financial stability, implements coherent financial system oversight as a "super-regulator", and has emerged as a pioneer in creating a framework to facilitate next-generation technological and financial innovation.

Some of the authority's recent fintech innovations include setting up a behavioural sciences unit, a technology risk supervision department and a data analytics group.

"The MAS has placed a keen emphasis on understanding the risks and benefits of new technology. It has upgraded Singapore's pay-

ments infrastructure and supported pioneering initiatives around cloud computing, artificial intelligence, big data and distributed ledger technology," Central Banking said.

The MAS was praised for its anti-money laundering efforts and for taking action against financial institutions and individuals linked to the alleged theft of funds from Malaysian state-owned development fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad.

The MAS closed two banks, BSI Bank and Falcon Private Bank, and fined another eight in relation to the scandal.

Central Banking also praised the MAS for tightening monetary policy in April and October last year, and for implementing other policies that helped to moderate housing price appreciation.

MAS managing director Ravi Menon said in the same statement: "This award is a tribute to the staff of MAS – their unstinting commitment to doing their best and the One MAS spirit of teamwork across the organisation."

"We would not have been able to achieve what we have without the strong partnership and support of the financial industry in Singapore, which has maintained high standards of prudence while pushing the boundaries of innovation."

Said DBS Group chief executive Piyush Gupta: "As the CEO of a major Singapore bank that is also on a transformational journey, I cannot ask for a more agile, informed, collaborative and visionary central bank as a partner."

Singapore Exchange chief executive Loh Boon Chye said: "The outcome of the MAS' sustained and consistent efforts is that Singapore is regarded as one of the largest fintech hubs in the world..."

"The MAS also hosts the annual FinTech Festival, in its third year



The Central Banking journal noted that the Monetary Authority of Singapore has an enviable track record for monetary and financial stability. PHOTO: MAS

running, which has become the largest fintech event in the world."

Award winners were judged by a panel comprising members of the Central Banking editorial team and an advisory board that included former central bank governors and Nobel Prize-winning economists.

The awards, now in their sixth

year, also recognised individuals in categories such as governor of the year, which was awarded to Bank of Israel governor Karnit Flug.

The presentation ceremony will be held at the annual Central Banking Awards gala dinner in London on March 13.

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TWIN APPROACH

The MAS has consistently been at the forefront of efforts to blend specific macro-prudential policy objectives within a backdrop of rigorous adherence to global regulatory standards. This twin approach, pragmatically applied, has anchored Singapore's financial sector for more than half a century.



DBS CHIEF EXECUTIVE PIYUSH GUPTA

FINTECH EFFORTS

The outcome of the MAS' sustained and consistent efforts is that Singapore is regarded as one of the largest fintech hubs in the world... The MAS also hosts the annual FinTech Festival, in its third year running, which has become the largest fintech event in the world.



SINGAPORE EXCHANGE CHIEF EXECUTIVE LOH BOON CHYE

STAFF COMMITTED TO DOING THEIR BEST

This award is a tribute to the staff of MAS – their unstinting commitment to doing their best and the One MAS spirit of teamwork across the organisation. We would not have been able to achieve what we have without the strong partnership and support of the financial industry in Singapore, which has maintained high standards of prudence while pushing the boundaries of innovation.



MAS MANAGING DIRECTOR RAVI MENON

Dealing with a different workforce and tech changes

Sue-Ann Tan

No one can miss the revolution that has shaken up workplaces over the past decade, not just in the way technology has replaced manual jobs, but also the attitude among youngsters who shun safe posts with big firms to job-hop and try new things.

This shake-up has forced companies to be agile in adapting to new trends so they can fully make use of their staff, says Mr James Lee, managing director for group human capital at insurer Great Eastern Holdings. He oversees the leadership and talent development of about 4,000 employees in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

Mr Lee, who has been with the company for 22 years and worked in human resources for about a decade, tells The Straits Times: "Our city is very global and it has evolved many times over the years."

"The challenge now is in dealing with a different workforce and how to reshape the world of work for Singapore."

A World Bank report stated last year that Singapore is doing well in terms of human capital with an index it produces ranking the Republic first out of 157 countries in terms of developing human capital.

But it is not just about having a workforce that is healthy and educated, as measured by some of the World Bank benchmarks, but ensur-



Mr James Lee, managing director for group human capital at insurer Great Eastern, says the young are gravitating away from larger firms because of their working preferences. "There is a focus on start-ups and the young people are going there. They like young companies that are nimble and fast with a creative flair," he says. ST PHOTO: SAHIBA CHAUDHARY

ing the different generations work together and are skilled in technology, Mr Lee says.

"Now, we have to deal with a five-generation workforce. There is the tech-savvy younger generation and the older generation that also has to catch up."

The five generations are often described as the traditionalists, who were born before 1946, baby boomers (1946 to 1964), Generation Xers (1965 to 1976), millennials (1977 to 1997) and the newest, Generation Z (born after 1997).

Mr Lee notes: "The current workforce will have to change because the workers have to be reskilled. More experienced or senior workers can upgrade their skills and even take on higher-value jobs."

The emphasis on skills means promotions in workplaces will no longer be based on tenure or seniority but on an employee's capabilities.

"People are the true assets of a company, so the only way to upgrade people is through learning. People are not machines to be oiled or serviced," he adds.

Great Eastern has been trying to make its operations more automated through technology.

In Mr Lee's human resources department, most of the processes, from the time it makes a request for a job role to be filled to the time the contract is signed, are digitised.

The strategy and transformation division, which drives the company's digitalisation efforts, also recently piloted an interactive tool to

help financial planners better serve customers while enhancing efficiency and productivity.

But introducing technology and upskilling also has its challenges.

Mr Lee says: "The hard part is really the human. We have to get the person to see the value-add of technology. People are usually apprehensive of what they do not know."

However, he adds that there are fewer people who want to do manual jobs.

He said: "The man in the street is already quite high-tech. A decade ago, you would never see a 70-year-old man on his phone app."

"Everyone has caught up with tech in some way or another. Having a general tech culture also helps to impact the workforce."

Besides moving towards technology and upskilling the workforce, Mr Lee says the young are gravitating away from larger companies because of their working preferences.

"There is a focus on start-ups and the young people are going there. They like young companies that are nimble and fast with a creative flair," he notes.

"It is harder to get someone young to join a big company with a structured workday. It's different from the past when people wanted to join a big company for the security."

"It is also normal for millennials to change jobs because they are not just working for money anymore."

In this sense, big companies have to strive even harder to appeal to

the younger workforce and draw them in. "These are the individuals who will drive technological change, so it is good to have them to help an organisation. At Great Eastern, we have a transformation department where the young people can create change," says Mr Lee.

Ultimately, while skills are important, he says the mindset is what matters most in a workforce.

"There is more demand for information technology skills, but the most important thing is being willing to pick things up. I don't know everything but it's about learning. Knowledge is infinite, so what you pick up is always good for you. It's all about the mindset."

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Aik Soon Hardware was founded by Mr Quek Bok Teck in 1982. The family-owned business, which has shifted its business focus from general hardware to valves, is now in the hands of the second generation, with two of Mr Quek's four children and a son-in-law forming its management team. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

SMESpotlight

Turning to niche field for growth

Aik Soon Hardware excelled by shifting focus from general hardware to valves

Aw Kwan Hong, Harsimran Kaur Arwinderjit Singh, Wong Kar Lye and Xu Zihao

Starting with a single desk in borrowed office space and just one telephone line, Aik Soon Hardware has grown from being a general hardware dealer to become a specialist distributor of marine and industrial valves.

Founded in 1982 by Mr Quek Bok Teck, the family-owned business is now in the hands of the second generation, with two of Mr Quek's four children and a son-in-law forming Aik Soon's management team.

They continue to run Aik Soon with the same values and principles of customer-centrism that Mr Quek has practised since its inception.

When Mr Quek started the company, he believed that conventional price competition was not the way forward if he wanted his business to be sustainable. Instead, he believed in differentiating his products through quality service and customer focus, while remaining affordable to customers.

Shifting its business focus from general hardware to valves was the first step that allowed Aik Soon to focus its efforts in excelling in a specific industry segment.

The firm's flat management structure enables seamless business operations and quick decision making to fulfil customer demands.

All of Aik Soon's nine staff take on multiple roles. For example, its warehouse supervisor can stand in for its machinist and drill the

flanges for valves should the latter be unavailable.

Sales staff also help with delivery whenever needed. Company staff may even board vessels to check measurements, instead of waiting for a third party.

The lack of bureaucracy and the empowerment of staff to make ad hoc decisions with external suppliers has helped to facilitate the fulfilment of customer orders.

Aik Soon has gone beyond indenting goods for inventories through middlemen to being the distributor for major brands.

The company's ability to obtain components from suppliers directly and at any time gives it the capability to deliver orders to its customers on the next day if stocks are available. It offers complementary services such as valve modification and valve automation with electric and pneumatic actuators.

It also offers complimentary visits to clients' vessels during dry dockings for checks, and regularly calls up clients to ask if they have other issues.

A policy of relationship management aids in high retention of existing customers, while increasing its customer base through positive word of mouth feedback.

Aik Soon also differentiates itself through innovation.

In 2008, the company integrated accounting and inventory functions onto a single system, which helped to save time and effort in stock keeping and keep inventory minimal. Another example is the installation of Global Positioning System in delivery vans to maximise efficiency.

Aik Soon's next project is to fully automate its office and boost its storage management efficiency by

tapping a new system that automatically tracks inventory, among other benefits.

Company director Lee Chin Ann said: "We have never been discouraged from being late adopters of innovation as we progress and reap from incremental innovative ideas."

In 2016, Aik Soon projected a substantial fall in revenue for the subsequent two years due to stagnation in the local valves market.

With a pickup in international oil prices, Aik Soon decided to seek opportunities in the overseas oil and gas, and marine industry, targeting Malaysia, Indonesia and Myanmar for their growth potential in these industries.

Over the past three decades, Aik Soon has established close relationships with reputable suppliers and is looking to form joint ventures. In this way, Aik Soon would be able to piggyback on established Singapore companies to venture abroad when opportunities arise.

This year, the company plans to leverage its experience to enter the Indonesian market.

Aik Soon's push into overseas markets is enhanced with its distributorship of two leading valve brands – Powell and Showa.

It also expects its overseas expansion to synchronise with its Singapore operation, which would not only act as headquarters, but also as an integrated coordination centre for functions such as training, logistics and marketing.

Mr Quek, the founder, once described Aik Soon's core principle as: "Treat others with sincerity, integrity and kindness, and stay grounded".

With that in mind, Aik Soon today is also a strong supporter of education, having contributed to various programmes, scholarships and funds in local universities.

The combination of these values, coupled with an adventurous yet prudent entrepreneurship, has led Aik Soon to expand from a rented office to what it is today.

Mr Lee said: "The amount of time it takes to build ideas into our successes can be discouraging at times, but moving forward with a positive attitude and hard work, success will definitely come."

• The writers are students at NUS Business School.

Commentary

Tapping ecosystems to drive business performance



Mervyn Koh

For The Straits Times

Businesses are increasingly dynamic and interconnected, where success can depend on how well a firm can cooperate with others.

The concept is far from new. Business strategist James Moore noted in the Harvard Business Review in 1993 that "successful businesses are those that evolve rapidly and effectively. Yet innovative businesses can't evolve in a vacuum. They must attract resources of all sorts, drawing in capital, partners, suppliers and customers to create cooperative networks".

Such cooperative networks are commonly known today as a business ecosystem. Much like a biological ecosystem where different organisms interact with and rely on one another to create a healthy, thriving environment, businesses also depend on an ecosystem of diverse stakeholders that contribute to their growth and success.

These stakeholders include customers, suppliers, financial partners, government bodies and industry associations.

The benefits of a business ecosystem are especially applicable to small businesses, as they tend to have limited resources and do not have the economies of scale required to enjoy the same advantages that large corporates have. As such, small businesses need to ensure that they are part of an ecosystem that provides them the knowledge, resources and capabilities to help overcome these challenges.

For example, it can be significantly faster for a small business to develop new products and capabilities by tapping an ecosystem partner's expertise rather than having to figure it out alone.

BENEFITING FROM ECOSYSTEMS

Small business owners tend to use only their internal resources in planning for growth and expansion. Such an approach could prove limiting in results if they do not have the requisite experience and know-how in these areas.

Therefore, small business owners should consider widening their lens to identify the areas where they are best equipped to achieve their ambitions and those where they need help. By tapping the strengths of the ecosystem and the relevant partners within, small businesses will also be able to accelerate their learning process or to develop new capabilities.

One of the ways we see companies tapping the benefits of an ecosystem is through co-working spaces. Co-working spaces offer companies the ability to connect with other tenants, which typically range from start-ups, technology companies, digital marketing firms and professional service providers such as lawyers, accountants and intellectual property specialists.

Through these connections, business owners benefit by being able to seek collaboration opportunities, cross-fertilise ideas and tap innovative technology as they grow their business. Once the business has decided on the areas in which it needs help, the next step is to determine which ecosystem best suits its needs by asking some of these questions:

- What ecosystems are available to the business?
- Can these ecosystems help to meet performance objectives?
- What role do they play in the innovation process – from providing expertise to the right solutions that will help improve the business' performance?
- Does the ecosystem have the potential to help attract

customers that the business seeks?

With an understanding of its needs, a small business will then be able to look for an ecosystem that can help it to catalyse its growth.

Finally, and perhaps the most interesting part, is finding partners within the right ecosystem to catalyse business growth. In determining a suitable ecosystem partner, businesses should consider factors such as the network, industry expertise and capabilities that the partner brings. Apart from looking to traditional partners such as industry associations or government bodies for help, small business owners may be surprised to learn that they can also gain the knowledge or capability required from firms in other industries.

For example, small businesses may not consider working with a budding start-up that has yet to demonstrate a track record for its solutions. However, they may find that by collaborating with the start-up on a proof-of-concept, it could create a win-win situation for both parties. This is because the small business is able to develop a solution that helps in its innovation efforts, while the start-up is able to demonstrate that it has a feasible solution.

Similarly, when it comes to the search for digital solutions that, according to a survey conducted by United Overseas Bank (UOB), is an area of focus for more than two in three businesses this year, business owners may confine their pursuits to technology providers.

Many other organisations in the business ecosystem, including UOB, have come together to provide digital solutions or to help small businesses adopt them.

UOB not only provides digital solutions in the area of banking and payments, but also helps small businesses harness technology to improve operational processes through UOB BizSmart, a cloud-based integrated solution.

In 2017, the bank tied up with SAP to offer complimentary access to the entry-level version of SAP Business One, an integrated enterprise resource planning software, through UOB BizSmart. This lets small businesses gain access to enterprise-level technology, which is typically used by larger companies, more easily and cost effectively.

They will also be able to access instantly up-to-date and critical information such as their financials, sales, customer relationship and inventory. With the information, they will be able to make more informed decisions for better business performance.

As small businesses work their way through the complexities of change today, they need to recognise that they are not alone in this process and that they have the support of the Government, financial institutions and service providers, to name a few.

By connecting with others in an ecosystem, small businesses will be able to unlock more benefits and build sustainable businesses for the future.

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• The writer is the managing director and country head of business banking Singapore, UOB.

Small business owners should consider widening their lens to identify the areas where they are best equipped to achieve their ambitions and those where they need help. By tapping the strengths of the ecosystem and the relevant partners within, small businesses will also be able to accelerate their learning process or to develop new capabilities.

KEY TO SUCCESS

The amount of time it takes to build ideas into our successes can be discouraging at times, but moving forward with a positive attitude and hard work, success will definitely come.



COMPANY DIRECTOR LEE CHIN ANN, on how the firm achieves success.

Apple names third retail chief in seven years for post-iPhone era

SAN FRANCISCO • Apple named its third retail chief in seven years, seeking to shake up store operations for a new era in which the company looks beyond pricey iPhones.

On Tuesday, Apple said company veteran Deirdre O'Brien would replace Ms Angela Ahrendts, who served in the role for about five years.

Ms O'Brien is the first insider tapped to run the Apple division since Mr Ron Johnson opened the first Apple store in 2001 and left a decade later. The departure of Ms Ahrendts, Apple's top female executive, was a surprise. But it also marked a turning point for the company and its approach to retail.

Sales of the iPhone – Apple's biggest product line – peaked last year, putting more pressure on chief executive Tim Cook to find new revenue streams while experimenting with

promotional pricing tactics that Ms Ahrendts eschewed.

With smartphone demand stagnating, Apple is building new digital services and subscription businesses that do not need as large a network of retail stores as its consumer hardware operations.

For the first time, the retail chief will also have other priorities because Ms O'Brien will continue to lead human resources.

When Ms Ahrendts joined Apple in 2014, she brought a luxury focus from her time running designer apparel company Burberry Group.

She turned Apple stores into stylish showcases for products, including the Watch that was initially marketed as a luxury product, with some models costing more than US\$10,000 (S\$13,500).

The expensive Watches did not



Apple veteran Deirdre O'Brien (left) is replacing Ms Angela Ahrendts, who served as retail chief for about five years.

sell well and Apple refocused the device as a health-tracking accessory.

About a month before Ms Ahrendts' departure was announced, Mr Cook warned that the company would miss its holiday sales target for the first time since 2001.

In December, the company asked retail employees to promote the new iPhones using methods not seen before. Technicians were told to push upgrades to consumers with out-of-warranty devices. Senior

sales staff had to make sure other retail workers suggested upgrades, and easels offering generous trade-in deals for the iPhone XR were erected in stores.

Apple's online home page was also replaced with reduced iPhone pricing that required a trade-in of older models.

Mr Cook called the announcements "bittersweet" on Twitter, thanking Ms Ahrendts and saying he could think of "no one better" than Ms O'Brien to run Apple's retail.

Ms O'Brien has worked at Apple since the 1980s and before taking over the company's human resources function, was a vice-president in charge of sales and operations. As vice-president of people, she oversees worker development, recruiting and employee support.

"We are encouraged that a core Apple insider took over the reins," said analyst Dan Ives at Wedbush Securities. "An outsider running retail going into one of the most pivotal, defining periods for Cook & Co in the company's history would have been a risky endeavour."

BLOOMBERG

Tech sector turns wary as ‘chip dip’ hurts sales

Notion of dip leading to general downturn evokes memories of dot.com bust of 2000

SAN FRANCISCO • Don't look now: Storm clouds are gathering over technology.

Chinese consumers have pulled back their spending, blowing a US\$9 billion (S\$12 billion) hole in Apple's recent quarterly revenue.

China was again a culprit when Nvidia warned last month that its revenue would come in 20 per cent below expectations, though the graphics chipmaker also blamed slack demand from bitcoin miners and cloud data centres.

Chipmaker Intel cited intensifying “trade and macro concerns” for financial results last month that did not meet expectations.

And Samsung, another semiconductor powerhouse, said sales plunged 10 per cent in the fourth quarter because of weakening demand for its memory chips from data centres and smartphones.

China, smartphones, bitcoin and cloud computing have been among the major drivers of the long tech boom, which in turn has powered the global economy for the last decade.

The ingredient common to all of these sectors is computer chips, which form the brains of devices and whose ubiquity means they pro-

vide early signals about changes in supply and demand.

Warnings about a sales slowdown this year have come in recent weeks from the big chip suppliers, which also include Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Micron Technology and Western Digital. It is an abrupt reversal, coming on the heels of stellar results last year for the business that gave Silicon Valley its name.

Last year, manufacturers shipped a staggering one trillion chips and other semiconductor devices, 10 per cent more than the year before, IC Insights estimates. But this year is shaping up to be a much different story, now that several important sources of chip demand appear to be dampening.

The notion that a chip dip could lead to a general downturn evokes memories of 2000, when one day tech had an unlimited future and the next, it was crashing in what became known as the dot.com bust.

Back then, investors showed no mercy. Intel made what seemed a modest adjustment to its revenue forecast for the third quarter of 2000, saying it would be up 3 per cent to 5 per cent instead of 7 per cent to 9 per cent. The value of the

company immediately fell by nearly 30 per cent over the next few days.

This year, with a similar downgrade, investors largely shrugged it off. Intel shed about 5 per cent of its value over a week.

While acknowledging the parallels to 2000, Mr Gene Munster, research director of venture capital firm Loup Ventures, said he thinks it is different this time. Back then, among the best customers for the established chip firms were start-ups, which had more dreams than revenue. As the start-ups faltered, the chip firms were imperilled. The storm lasted for years.

“These are all real companies now, with real customers,” Mr Munster said. “People are willing to look past a few bumpy months.”

Even if the problems do not linger, they are a reminder that demand is not eternal. That seems to be what happened with smartphones, which use multiple varieties of chips to run software, process data and connect to cellular networks.

Consider Apple, which gave a muted forecast last October for the holiday season and followed up early last month with its first full-fledged revenue warning in 16 years. The iPhone maker faces stiff competition and slumping demand in China. Total smartphone shipments fell 15 per cent in that coun-

Long-time tech industry watchers began picking up trouble signs late last spring in the market for memory chips, an essential component in computers that in decades past prompted trade tensions between the United States and rivals in Japan and South Korea. Makers of a key category called dynamic random access memory, or DRAM, have suffered product shortages and gluts that whipsawed pricing and heralded changing fortunes for the broader industry.

try in the fourth quarter, according to research firm Canalys.

Mr Michael Wolf, who surveys consumers annually about their use of technology and media for his management consulting firm Activate, said people seem to be shifting to lower-priced phone models and cheaper service plans. But he said demand seems strong for digital subscription services like Netflix, video games, online advertising and business-to-business sales for companies like Microsoft.

“From all of our research, I don't see some general consumer malaise,” he said.

Yet several other businesses appear to be softening as well, including the market for server systems used by cloud service operators, including Amazon, Microsoft and Google. Sales of high-priced chips for such hardware have driven profits for companies like Intel and Nvidia, but they now say equipment buyers for data centres have turned cautious.

“Cloud service providers shifted from building capacity to absorbing capacity,” Mr Robert Swan, who was then Intel's chief financial officer and acting chief executive, said on a conference call after Intel released its fourth-quarter results.

Long-time tech industry watchers began picking up trouble signs late last spring in the market for memory chips, an essential component in computers that in decades past prompted trade tensions between the United States and rivals in Japan and South Korea.

Makers of a key category called dynamic random access memory, or DRAM, have suffered product shortages and gluts that whipsawed pricing and heralded changing fortunes for the broader industry. During the dot.com bust in 2001, DRAM revenue plummeted 63 per cent while total semiconductor revenue fell 31 per cent, according to Gartner data.

But conditions changed dramatically over the years as manufacturers fled from the lack of profits, leaving three major DRAM makers – Samsung, Hynix and Micron. They have been slow to boost production, enabling them to keep their prices high. And they also benefited as memory became more important in smartphones, data centre hardware and other products beyond the personal computers that once drove most sales.

“The markets today are structurally different,” Micron chief executive Sanjay Mehrotra said in a recent interview.

Yet market cycles have not disappeared entirely. DRAM prices peaked last June and began sliding, prompting Micron and Samsung to issue their recent profit warnings. DRAMeXchange, a Taiwan-based firm that tracks the market, predicts DRAM prices will fall an additional 20 per cent in the first quarter.

Memory chips “behave like onions or steel or any other commodity”, said Objective Analysis market researcher Jim Handy. “If there is an oversupply, prices fall.”

For all the turmoil, industry executives and analysts said business conditions remain a lot healthier than during past semiconductor slumps. For one thing, a series of mergers has reduced price competition.

Companies like Micron, which routinely lost money in past cycles, are expected to remain solidly profitable even if sales dip.

Beyond that, there is the glorious future.

“Eventually, the storm will pass and these companies – Nvidia, Apple, Samsung – will have pole position in the next tech growth curve, including AI (artificial intelligence), healthcare, self-driving cars and 5G,” said Mr Munster of Loup Ventures. “The curve is so exciting, so juicy, so full of opportunity.”

NYTIMES

Toyota cuts forecast as nine-month net profit dives 30%

TOKYO • Japanese car giant Toyota yesterday slashed its full-year net profit forecast after profits tumbled nearly 30 per cent in the first nine months.

The maker of the Camry sedan and Prius hybrid now expects annual net profit of 1.87 trillion yen (S\$23 billion) instead of the 2.3 trillion yen it projected three months ago.

The new forecast represents a 25 per cent plunge from the last year.

Its net profit for the nine months to December came to 1.42 trillion yen, down 29.3 per cent from the same period the previous year.

Operating profit rose 9.5 per cent to 1.94 trillion yen on sales of 22.5 trillion yen, a rise of 3.1 per cent.

Fellow Japanese automaker Honda last week logged a net profit fall of 34.5 per cent for the nine months to December, but revised up its full-year forecasts due to strong motorcycle sales.

Nissan is to announce results next week, the first since its former chief executive Carlos Ghosn was arrested on Nov 19 last year for financial misconduct.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

\$23b

Toyota's revised annual net profit forecast, which represents a 25 per cent plunge from the last year.



A Toyota car showroom in Tokyo yesterday. The Japanese car giant's net profit for the nine months to December came to 1.42 trillion yen, down 29.3 per cent from the same period the previous year. It now expects annual net profit of 1.87 trillion yen instead of the 2.3 trillion yen it projected three months ago. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Snap halts user exodus; shares soar on financial results

SAN FRANCISCO • Snap lost millions of users last year after an unpopular redesign of Snapchat, its “ephemeral” messaging app. Now, that exodus appears to be slowing.

The company said on Tuesday it had stanchied the flow of people leaving its platform. Snap's daily active users totalled 186 million in the fourth quarter, the same as in the previous quarter and down just one million from a year earlier, after two consecutive quarters of falling user numbers.

In addition, Snap's revenue rose 36 per cent to US\$390 million (S\$528 million), while its net loss fell to US\$192 million.

“Change is always difficult, and this past year was no exception,” Snap chief executive Evan Spiegel said in prepared remarks about the company's earnings.

Wall Street analysts said they were relieved at Snap's financial results, which sent its shares soaring more than 20 per cent in after-hours trading, following months of turbulence for the company.

Since going public in 2017, Snap has been dealing with increasing competition from Facebook, including its core social network and its other apps, such as Instagram and WhatsApp.

Last year, Snap redesigned its

app, effectively separating social and media into two sections. Its users soon revolted, with celebrities like Kylie Jenner criticising the change.

More recently, Snap endured a wave of executive departures. The company said last month that its chief financial officer, Mr Tim Stone, would leave, less than a year after he was hired last May.

Mr Imran Khan, Snap's chief strategy officer, stepped down last September. That same month, the company lost Mr Nick Bell, its vice-president for content.

Its head of hardware, Mr Sahil Sharma, exited in December.

On top of this, Snap is under scrutiny from the Securities and Exchange Commission and Justice Department in the United States.

The company said late last year it had responded to subpoenas from those agencies regarding disclosures it made before its initial public offering.

In an earnings call on Tuesday, Mr Spiegel said he planned to take time with the search for a new chief financial officer “and really get it right”.

Snapchat users on Apple devices are starting to return to the platform and daily active use has increased among those people.

Snapchat's Android app update is also gradually being introduced to a small set of users, allowing them to open the app 20 per cent faster, Mr Spiegel said.

He estimated that there are two billion Android users who do not use Snapchat – and that luring even a small percentage of them to the app would “make a real difference”.

Ms Lara Sweet, Snap's interim chief financial officer, said the company was “cautiously optimistic” that user numbers would not decline in the current quarter.

In total, Snap said it anticipated revenue of US\$285 million to

US\$310 million during the current quarter.

Still, Snap remains small compared with Facebook's photo-sharing app Instagram, which has been rapidly gaining new users.

Facebook announced during its earnings call last week that Instagram had 500 million daily active users of Stories, a feature that lets people share photos and videos that have a lifespan of 24 hours.

Snapchat had pioneered the Stories feature.

“This was by far the most hated stock of all of the Internet, by 10 miles,” Mr Brent Thill, a managing director at Jefferies who follows tech companies, said of Snap. “What they did was a step in the right direction. They are not out of this yet, but this is step one.”

NYTIMES

With Deepest Sympathy & Heartfelt Condolences to
the Family of our Late Non-Executive Director



Mr Ben Goi

Departed on 3 February 2019

From:

Management & Staff of



UNION STEEL HOLDINGS LIMITED

友联钢铁控股有限公司



Low Ah Soo

Age: 94

Passed away peacefully on 5 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones

Husband: Ng Man Ping (deceased)

Children:

Dr. Ng Pock Too
Dr. Ng Pock Liok
Dr. Ng Hoo Wah
Ng Pock Yin

Grandchildren:

Dr. Jeremy Ng Chung Fai
Dr. Arthur Ng Chung Khern
Jonathan Ng Chung Hoe
Karen NgWeng Yue
Dr. Ng Weng Yan
Ng Weng Chi
Dr. Yvonne Chung Hsi-Wei
Dr. Jerel Chung Wai Keen

Spouses:

Ng Yoke Lin
Chong Cheng Kit
Dr. ChungWeng Siong
Lam Kit Wing

Spouses:

Lena Lee Sumei
Dr. Gladys Tan Gek Yen
Chua Sui Tong
Wayde R Nash

Dr. Liu Jun Qing

Great-Grandchildren:

Joshua Ng Shao Gin
Julian Ng Shao Jie
Janelle Ng Ying Xuan
Jensen Ng Shao Zhi
Matthew Chua Jie Wen
Gabriel Chua Jie Wei
Renee Chung Hui Wen
Ryan Chung Hao Yang

Wake is held at Singapore Casket Level 4, Crystal Hall,
131 Lavender Street, Singapore 338737.

Cortege leaves on Saturday 9 February 2019 at 1.05pm for
Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 for cremation at 2.05pm.

The family requests no wreaths please.

The family wishes to express heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Dr Tang Kok Foo,
Dr Teo Wee Siong, Dr Tan Yeh Hong, Dr Toh Choon Lai, Dr Victor Chee and Dr Winston Jong
who attended to her professionally over the recent years.

In particular the family appreciates the care and kindness
of the entire Nursing Staff of Ward 6, Mount Elizabeth Hospital Orchard.

OM SAI RAM



Aandal Manikam

Passed away peacefully on 29 January 2019
at Sydney, Australia.

Dearly missed and fondly remembered
by loved ones.

Children: Sarada & Ananda

Grandchildren: Ganesh, Gayatri, Adithya & Rathna
Great-grandchildren: Meenakshi, Shivani & Raman

Funeral held on 1 February 2019 in Australia.

19th Anniversary
In Loving Memory Of



ALBERT HO SEOW IMM
Departed on 7 Feb 2000
Always Remembered &
Cherished By
Mr & Mrs Joseph Sim (Joe)

In Loving Memory Of



BABY LOW KOON WEE
(of the Hawaiinares)
Departed: 7 Feb 1991
Always remembered by Loved Ones



Waxson Lou Lian Huat

Age: 62

Passed away peacefully on
4 February 2019, dearly missed
and remembered by loved ones.
Son & Daughter-in-law:
Favian & Vivian
Granddaughter: Adela
Brother & Sister-in-law:
Late Loo Kim Swee
& Late Doris Tan Kwee Lan
Sisters & Brothers-in-law:
Loo Kim Keat & Late Teo Tiong Beng
Lu Soh Geok & Late Ng Kee Mui
Ammie Lou

Nephews & Nieces-in-law:
Teo Cheng Leong & Ng Ann Nee
Teo Cheng Guan & Jenny Won
Teo Choon Poh
Ng Siang Yong
Shawn Low & Iris Pang
Nieces & Nephew-in-law:
Teo Siew Ling & Eddie Pang
Estrella Loo
Josephine Loo
Shanice Loo

And all relatives and friends.
Wake is held at Block 205 Toa Payoh
North (MPH), Singapore 310205.
(Braddell MRT Exit A)
Cortege leaves on Sunday
10 February 2019 at 11.05am
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1
for cremation at 12.05pm.

3rd Anniversary



IN LOVING MEMORY
KOK SIEW HUI

Departed 07/02/2016

Today recalls sad memories,
Of a dear mother gone to rest,
And the one who
thinks of her today
Is the one who loves
her best.

Dearly missed & fondly remembered by
all Children, Sons-in-law, Daughters-in-law,
Grandsons & Granddaughters.

Share
the message of
farewell with
loved ones & friends



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SMS or social media.

STClassifieds

SPORT

2.5

GAMES LOS ANGELES LAKERS ARE BEHIND FOR THE LAST PLAY-OFF SPOT C6

ARIYA EYES ASIAN BREAKTHROUGH

World No. 1 Thai golfer believes a strong mindset and hard work are key to elusive title

David Lee

She created history on the US LPGA Tour last year when she swept the season-ending honours – the first golfer to do so.

World No. 1 golfer Ariya Jutanugarn clinched the Annika Major Award for the best record in all five Major championships, the Player of

the Year award, the Vare Trophy with a scoring average of 69.415, and topped the money list with US\$2,667,983 (S\$3.6 million).

The all-conquering Thai also won the Race to the CME Globe and its US\$1 million bonus, and set single-season records for rounds in the 60s (57) and birdies (470).

Even as the 23-year-old looks to have the golfing world under her

feet, she still has unfinished business in her own backyard.

Her 10 LPGA Tour wins in the last three years included the 2016 Women's British Open and the 2018 US Women's Open but she has never won an LPGA Tour event in Asia.

As the LPGA Tour heads to Chonburi (Honda LPGA Thailand) and Singapore (HSBC Women's World Championship) this month, she told The Straits Times in an e-mail interview: "Obviously, I would love to win in my home country before I come to Singapore, but I would certainly like to add a win in

Asia at some point soon!"

Ariya is no stranger to breaking barriers. She was the youngest to qualify for an LPGA Tour event when she made the 2001 Honda LPGA Thailand at 11, before becoming the first Asean player to win a golfing Major at the 2016 Women's British Open.

But it was not always smooth sailing. As a rookie in 2015, she missed 10 straight cuts on the Tour before her breakthrough 2016 season in which she won her first Major and four other events.

Even then, she went on to miss

the cut in four out of five Majors.

Ariya's achievements have come with great expectations every round and every week, and she did not always know how to deal with it and would sometimes break down on the course. These days, she tries to unwind off the course with Thai music and drama, while smiling as much as possible on it.

She said: "It is well documented that I had a tough first year and, while it was difficult at the time, it made me stronger mentally and more appreciative of success. A few years ago when I played well, I would just be lazy and not practise."

"There's a lot nobody knows... The feeling I had in 2017 was the worst place you can be. I felt like I couldn't be proud of myself because I didn't try to do anything different."

"But this never happened (any more) because I know I still want to improve. And what can make me proud is when I work hard and practise."

"This year, I have been working hard on my attitude and good self-talk on the golf course and that will continue to be a focus with my coaches Pia (Nilsson) and Lynn (Marriott)."

Over the years, there have been

many women golfers such as Lorena Ochoa, Ai Miyazato, Shin Jiyai and Tseng Ya-ni who retired early or faded into oblivion after reaching the top.

Ariya is determined to be the world's best woman golfer for as long as she can.

"I can only keep doing what I can do to stay healthy and focused," she said. "The quality of players on the LPGA is growing every year, which is great for the Tour, and I know I have to keep getting better."

"Last year was fantastic, but we all start a new season at the same place and I need to keep focusing on improving and not worrying about wins."

"I want to keep playing as long as I am still enjoying it. It is great being on Tour with (older sister) Moriya, which makes life on the road a whole lot better, but my focus is towards continually improving and being the best player and person I can be."

davidlee@sph.com.sg

• The HSBC Women's World Championship will be held at Sentosa Golf Club's Tanjong Course from Feb 28 to March 3. Day passes from \$22 are available at apactix.com



GUNNING FOR A HOME WIN

Obviously, I would love to win in my home country before I come to Singapore, but I would certainly like to add a win in Asia at some point soon!



ARIYA JUTANUGARN, world No. 1 golfer, on her desire to pick up her first Asian title at the upcoming LPGA events in Thailand and Singapore.

Ariya Jutanugarn, 23, created history on the US LPGA Tour last year by becoming the first golfer to claim all season-ending honours. She clinched the Annika Major Award for the best record in all five Major championships, the Player of the Year award, the Vare Trophy and the Race to the CME Globe.

PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Koepka tells Garcia to 'grow up' after on-course outburst

LOS ANGELES • Three-time Major champion Brooks Koepka has publicly rebuked Sergio Garcia for his temper tantrum at the European Tour's inaugural Saudi International last Saturday, calling on the Spaniard to "grow up".

Garcia was disqualified from the event, which Dustin Johnson eventually won, for what the Tour deemed as "serious misconduct".

The tournament attracted a star-studded field – including four of the world's five top-ranked players – by paying out huge appearance fees, but the Spaniard failed to live up to billing as one of the big names.

Video footage posted on social media showed the 2017 Masters champion slamming his golf club

into the sand three times after a mediocre bunker shot, before angrily speaking in Spanish as he departed the trap at the Royal Greens Golf and Country Club in King Abdullah Economic City.

Although Garcia, 39, later apologised for his overreaction in a statement released by the Tour, Koepka felt he had "acted like a child".

In an interview with the Playing Through podcast on Tuesday, the American said: "It's unfortunate that he's got to do that and complain. Everybody's got to play the same golf course."

"I didn't play very good (Koepka finished joint-57th), but you didn't really see anybody else doing that. I mean, you're (almost) 40 years old.

"It's frustrating as a player to see. To act like that, the disrespect to everybody, is not cool. It's not setting a good example and it's not cool to us, showing us no respect."

While the 28-year-old took umbrage with Garcia's meltdown, he was in a far better mood when asked about the PGA Championship moving from August to May for the first time, claiming the change in date would give him a better chance at golf's "Grand Slam".

He added: "If I can get on a nice run, you can rattle off all the Majors, which would be nice."

The event, which will take place from May 16-19 at the Bethpage Black Course, is now second in the calendar order of Majors, preceding

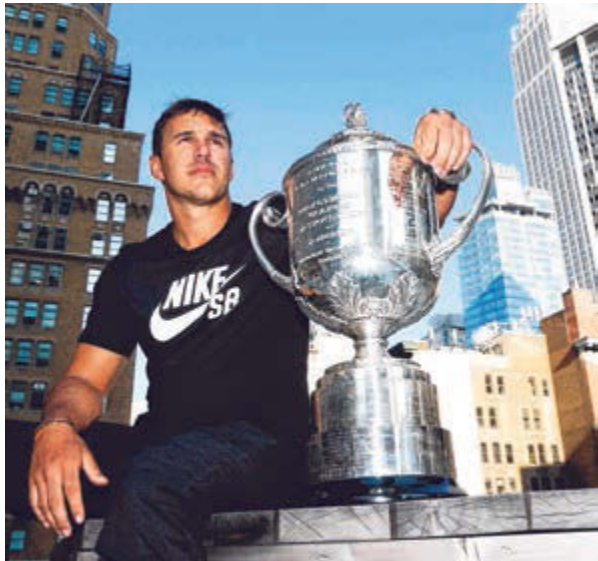
June's US Open and the British Open in July.

Koepka revealed that he was "super excited" to defend his crown.

He said: "New York fans are a lot of fun and, any time you can play in front of them and you're doing well, that's an added bonus. I know the course and I'm excited to play it."

"It's definitely a lot different, but it's a good change. I like the fact that everything is so congested, or feels that way, from the Players (Championship) in March to basically when the Open is done."

"You've seen guys get hot and they go for four months where they just play some incredible golf and, hopefully, I can set myself up to do that." AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS



Brooks Koepka, in New York with the PGA Championship trophy, found Sergio Garcia's behaviour at the Saudi event upsetting.

PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

GROWING CALLS FOR SOLSKJAER TO BE BOSS

Rooney feels Norwegian has proven himself; Sutton says United's big guns are behind him

LONDON • Former Manchester United captain Wayne Rooney has backed his former teammate and caretaker manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer to take over the hot seat on a full-time basis in the summer.

The Norwegian, who replaced Jose Mourinho in December, has made a compelling case for a permanent appointment after guiding United to seven wins and a draw in the Premier League.

With the Red Devils just two points off the top four and displaying a free-flowing attacking style that was sorely missing under Solskjaer's predecessor, Rooney felt the 45-year-old had proven himself.

"Ole's a fantastic person. It'd be nice to see Ole continue with this form and get a shot at the job on a permanent basis," United's all-time record scorer, on 253 goals, told CNN World Sport in an interview.

However, if the Old Trafford hierarchy decides against hiring Solskjaer, then Tottenham Hotspur boss Mauricio Pochettino, the early bookmakers' favourite, would be the "right guy" in his eyes.

Rooney added: "If the club go to choose from somewhere else, then in my opinion, Pochettino would be (the best alternative)."

However, the Argentinian, who

joined Spurs from Southampton in 2014 and has guided the north London club to consecutive top-three finishes in the league, has yet to win silverware in his managerial career.

While Solskjaer has fared little better, having won only domestic trophies in his country, BT Sport pundit Chris Sutton felt that should not count against the 45-year-old as he had "transformed the club".

He told the TV channel: "In the early stages, they said these were games he should be winning, but I disagree with that.

"They have their belief back, why not give it to him? He's proved himself, albeit in a short space of time, but it's not just the results, it's the manner in which they've done it. The style of play, he's got all of the big players onside.

"It would be the sensible thing to do. It would be more of a risk not to give it to him."

Former United midfielder Jonathan Greening agreed with the former Blackburn Rovers striker, telling BBC Radio 5 Live's Football Daily podcast that Solskjaer had won over the dressing room and "brought the confidence and enjoyment back to the players".

He added: "They're still playing for the shirt, but probably the at-

tacking players have got a bit more of a licence to rotate, attack, get forward without actually doing the defensive duties. Solskjaer has let them off the leash a little bit."

However, not all have been sold on the increasing calls for the former United striker to take on one of football's biggest jobs on a long-term basis.

Former United midfielder Paul Ince, who has been one of Solskjaer's most vociferous critics since his interim appointment, told BBC Sport "anyone could have come in and done the same".

He said: "I have got absolutely nothing against Ole but, when I looked at teams who have done something similar and given permanent jobs to interim managers, not many of them lasted very long.

"Roberto di Matteo at Chelsea is a good example of that, as is Craig Shakespeare at Leicester.

"It could be the same with Solskjaer - no matter what he achieves this season, it will not mean he is the right man to take the club forward."

The club, who will face Fulham in the league on Saturday, are expected to make a decision on their manager at the end of the season.

REUTERS



Manchester United interim manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, with assistant coaches Mike Phelan (left) and Michael Carrick, watching Anthony Martial in action during his first match in charge against Cardiff City in December. The 45-year-old Norwegian has taken United to within two points of fourth-placed Chelsea since he replaced the sacked Jose Mourinho. PHOTO: REUTERS

Rescuers try to recover body from Sala's plane

LONDON • British crash investigators are two days into an underwater operation to recover a body from the wreckage of the plane carrying Argentinian striker Emiliano Sala in the English Channel.

The mission started on Tuesday and, as of press time yesterday, the body had yet to be recovered. According to news website WalesOnline, the recovery could take days as it is "dependent on the weather, current and tide conditions".

"We are attempting to recover the body. If we are successful, we will consider the feasibility of recovering the aircraft wreckage," said an Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) spokesman.

The light aircraft carrying the 28-year-old - Cardiff's record buy at £15 million (\$\$26.3 million) - had been flying from Nantes to the Welsh capital when air traffic controllers lost contact with pilot David Ibbotson near the Channel is-

land of Guernsey on Jan 21.

David Mearns, the shipwreck hunter hired by Sala's family after funds had been raised through an on-line crowdfunding campaign, found the plane wreckage last Sunday.

The AAIB has since taken over operations, but it warned on Tuesday that strong tides "mean we can only use the remotely operated vehicle for limited periods each day".

"Regardless of the results, we will not be making a further statement until the families have been informed," it said.

Horacio, Sala's father, has given up hope of finding his son alive, but he is hoping for a successful outcome to the operation to get closure.

He told Fox Sports: "There's no longer any hope. We hope the two bodies are inside (the plane).

"It's over, the only thing I hope now is that they find them."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Hazard's Chelsea future in doubt, Real move mooted

LONDON • Eden Hazard's future at Chelsea seems to be in severe doubt after the forward admitted that he has come to a decision about his next step, with a move to Real Madrid thought to be his preference.

"I know what I am going to do. I have made a decision," Hazard told French radio station RMC, although he did not elaborate.

The interview was recorded two months ago as part of a documentary about his career, but it was only released earlier this week and may colour the context of the guessing games that have continued to follow his every move.

Uncertainty over the 28-year-old's plans has been an unwelcome undercurrent to Chelsea's season.

Hazard has admitted to being torn between staying at Stamford Bridge and the "dream" switch to

Real, a club he referred to in October as "the best in the world".

While Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri has pressed the Belgium international to make up his mind, saying in December it was "time to decide" the issue, he has also accepted his star player could leave if that was his wish.

"If he wants to go, he has to go," the Italian said last week.

The situation is particularly concerning given that Hazard's contract expires in June 2020 and he is yet to entertain new terms.

If the European champions and Hazard are both open to a deal, then Chelsea are unlikely to stand in his way, although it could take a nine-figure bid to seal his exit.

According to the Evening Standard, the Blues will demand more than £100 million (\$\$175.3 million) before sanctioning his depar-

ture, although Real could include Croatian midfielder Mateo Kovacic, who is on loan at Stamford Bridge, to sweeten the deal.

Should the blockbuster move take place in the summer, Chelsea will need a big-name replacement, but that player is unlikely to be Barcelona's Philippe Coutinho.

Despite rumours of a return to English football circling the Brazil forward, who has struggled to nail down a starting place in Spain since moving from Liverpool for £142 million last January, Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu has put the speculation to bed.

He said: "Are we going to consider the sale of Coutinho? No. It's not (possible), he is very young (26) and we expect a lot from him.

"He plays differently, he knows how we play, we do not want to sell." THE GUARDIAN

SportsWorld

Slingers leave it too late in narrow defeat

Xavier Alexander top-scored with 29 points and John Fields added 26 but the Singapore Slingers' fightback was not enough in a 87-84 loss to Mono Vampire in the Asean Basketball League.

Their poor start last night in Nonthaburi proved costly, trailing 31-21 after the first quarter and 54-39 at half-time. They drop to fifth in the standings with a win-loss record of 9-7.

Bring on City, after Newport stun Boro

LONDON • Fourth-tier Newport County will take on Premier League champions Manchester City in the fifth round of the FA Cup after shocking Championship high-fliers Middlesbrough 2-0 in a replay on Tuesday.

Robbie Willmott and Pdraig Amond scored brilliant second-half goals for the Welsh side to secure a plum tie at home to Pep Guardiola's side on Feb 16.

Brentford will play Swansea in the fifth round after seeing off non-league outfit Barnet 3-1. Second-tier Queens Park Rangers will host Watford next after beating Portsmouth 2-0.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Qatar pledges worker reform before 2022

DOHA • Qatar said yesterday that it is committed to labour reform following an Amnesty International report that the 2022 World Cup host is failing to stop widespread labour abuse.

The human rights group called on Qatar to enforce current labour laws, increase the minimum wage and scrap the "kafala" or sponsorship system, which ties workers to their employers, restricts their ability to change jobs or leave the country.

Doha said it was on course to deliver "lasting" change before the World Cup.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Vonn skips training following race crash

ARE (SWEDEN) • Lindsey Vonn sat out women's downhill training at the Alpine skiing world championships yesterday after a high-speed crash in the opening Super-G.

Sunday's downhill in Are will be the final race of the former Olympic champion's career after she announced her retirement last week.

The 34-year-old American great, winner of 82 World Cup races, had a black eye when crashing out of Tuesday's Super G won by compatriot Mikaela Shiffrin.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Horse trainer banned four years for 'jiggers'

SYDNEY • Melbourne Cup-winning Australian trainer Darren Weir was banned for four years yesterday from horse racing in Victoria state for possessing electronic devices used to shock horses into running faster.

The penalty on Weir, who trained 2015 Cup winner Prince of Penzance, followed dramatic police raids on several rural properties last week, including the veteran trainer's stables.

He did not contest three charges of possessing the Taser-like "jiggers".

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

GOLF

European Tour Vic Open: Day 1 (StarHub Ch204, noon).

TOMORROW

BASKETBALL

ABL HK Eastern v Alab Pilipinas (StarHub Ch202, 8.30pm).

CRICKET

2nd T20 Int'l NZ v India (Singtel TV

Ch123 & StarHub Ch236, 2pm).

FOOTBALL

Spanish LaLiga Valladolid v Villarreal (StarHub Ch213, Saturday, 3.55am).

GOLF

European Tour Vic Open: Day 2

(StarHub Ch204, noon).

For latest updates, go to singtelv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS				
Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Thu, 7 Feb 2019				
A League	Newcastle Jets	Wellington	4.50pm	LW
Fri, 8 Feb 2019				
Italian League	Lazio	Empoli	3.30am	LW*
LW* : Telecast available at Livewire(Marina Bay Sands) only. Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.				
No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize.				
LW: Livewire (MBS) & Livewire (RWS) (21 years and above)				
Livewire (Singapore Pools) (21 years and above during 'Live' telecast)				
SB: Sportsbuzz@Korea (21 years and above)				
Singapore Pools Account Service. Call 6796 6688 for more details.				
PLAY RESPONSIBLY				
Site Log: National Problem Gambling Helpline: 1800-6-888-888				
RCB Reg No: 196020203				

NO CHEER DESPITE JAMES' FEAT

He reaches 32,000 points but loss is his largest as Davis saga is hurting Lakers

INDIANAPOLIS • Despite becoming the fifth player in National Basketball Association (NBA) history to pass 32,000 points, LeBron James had little cause for celebration on Tuesday.

Not only did the forward suffer the biggest margin of defeat of his NBA career as the Indiana Pacers humbled the Los Angeles Lakers 136-94, but it was also clear for all to see at the Bankers Life Fieldhouse that the Anthony Davis trade rumours had divided the team into two camps – James and everybody else.

Social media was abuzz over TV footage, which captured the 15-time All-Star, who had a team-high 18 points, sitting three chairs apart from the rest of his teammates near the end of the game. To many, it was a symbol of how fractured the Lakers are at the moment.

Reports earlier this week indicated that the team had offered as many as six players in a bid to land New Orleans Pelicans star Davis and, according to ESPN, James and Rajon Rondo have been the “only players whose play hasn’t been affected by the talks”.

The Pacers, who were paced by 24 points from Bojan Bogdanovic, capitalised on the disharmony by tying their franchise record with 19 three-pointers, while forcing 19 Lakers turnovers, and their fans mercilessly taunted Brandon Ingram when he stepped up to the free-throw line, yelling: “LeBron’s going to trade you.”

While the forward, who scored 12 points, later claimed it was just white noise, having “been through and heard way worse things in my life”, he cryptically referred to the speculation, saying he could “only control what I can control”.

James, who had to sit out the Lakers’ previous game after returning from a 17-game absence, also felt that the hostile reception was “just fans being fans”, saying: “If you let that bother you, you’re in the wrong sport.”

However, he conceded to reporters that the gossip had thrown his teammates off their game.

He added: “I know it has to be tough on a lot of our guys, especially



Lakers forward LeBron James taking a shot, as Indiana Pacers centre Myles Turner goes for the block at the Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis during the hosts’ 136-94 win. PHOTO: REUTERS

our young guys. Right now, they’ve just never been a part of it and they’re hearing it every single day. I know the worst thing you can do right now is to be on social media.

“I know all young guys love social media. That definitely can’t help.”

Post-game, Lakers coach Luke Walton admitted to website Spectrum SportsNet that the trade rumours “affect everyone differently”, before adding: “We know we have to be a lot better.

“There’s a million excuses that

we can come up with – the travel, the first game coming across the country, everything else. Bottom line is we have to be better.”

But, with the Lakers (27-27) now 2½ games behind the Los Angeles Clippers for the eighth and final play-off spot in the West and three successive road games at the Boston Celtics, the Philadelphia 76ers and the Atlanta Hawks to come, the team could slip even further from contention by next week.

The team are certainly facing an

42

Biggest points margin of defeat LeBron James suffered in the LA Lakers’ capitulation to the Indiana Pacers, against whom he also scored his 32,000th point.

uncertain post-season after the Los Angeles Times reported on Tuesday that they had informed the Pelicans that they were pulling out of trade talks for Davis.

According to the newspaper, the Lakers had modified their offer to the Pelicans and were willing to trade Lonzo Ball, Kyle Kuzma, Ingram, Josh Hart, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope and Ivica Zubac.

In addition, they had agreed to part with two first-round draft picks and to take Solomon Hill and

his US\$12.7 million (\$\$17.1 million) contract along with Davis.

However, a source told the Times the Pelicans “wanted more and more and more” and “there was no more to give”. The Times and ESPN’s Adrian Wojnarowski reported the Pelicans wanted eight draft picks instead – four first-round and four second-round picks. But Wojnarowski hinted the deal could be revived if New Orleans return with a counter-offer. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

SINGAPORE SWEEP				
Draw No. 1006/2019				
and 4-D Draw No. 4378/2019				
Date of Draw: Feb 06, 2019				
1st Prize	(\$2.3 million)	: 284	2397	
2nd Prize	(\$500,000)	: 341	2302	
3rd Prize	(\$250,000)	: 399	5772	
10 JACKPOT PRIZES (\$10,000 EACH)				
1231176	1292753	1563484	2304960	2429226
2576357	2585726	2733501	3475422	3749058
10 LUCKY PRIZES (\$5,000 EACH)				
1089576	1195155	1287662	1297319	2055136
2749765	3163203	3196668	3629089	3919920
30 GIFT PRIZES (\$3,000 EACH)				
1108108	1181637	1339207	1367033	1441795
1448295	1493442	1554541	1814188	1878679
1912843	1961154	1968970	2006682	2289103
2428084	2434194	2520054	2686619	2746385
2776364	3010809	3026902	3240447	3318172
3523630	3741100	4309790	4385947	4418849
30 CONSOLATION PRIZES (\$2,000 EACH)				
1141043	1217668	1314962	1357321	1376028
1411572	1507502	1528945	1803286	2110800
2155857	2612857	2627987	2685286	2812956
3079976	3138189	3507237	3511741	3643862
3661806	3794078	3847372	4062518	4070734
4183673	4208798	4216574	4344394	4345069
50 PARTICIPATION PRIZES (\$1,000 EACH)				
1125704	1208510	1224456	1370468	1514149
1620287	1660394	1829670	1840046	1845294
1940379	1948990	2011499	2014986	2106730
2114729	2161624	2190025	2408756	2445237
2453623	2549605	2612315	2673249	2690193
2700314	2790056	2881592	2936947	2977033
3032126	3033232	3051678	3063583	3073365
3087499	3089045	3140629	3235764	3242765
3328406	3377324	3694275	3750931	3917723
3992428	4081431	4089286	4123804	4208288
315,000 2D DELIGHT PRIZES (\$6 EACH)				
Ticket numbers ending with				
02	17	20		
42	58	68		
78	82	96		
● The last four digits (underlined) of the First, Second, Third, 10 Jackpot and 10 Lucky Prizes of the Singapore Sweep Draw No. 1006/2019 form the winning numbers of the 4-D Draw No. 4378/2019.				
● Prize can be claimed from Thursday, Feb 7, 2019.				
Prizes not claimed by Monday, Aug 5, 2019 shall be forfeited.				
● Prizes of any amount can be claimed at Singapore Pools (Private) Limited at 210 Middle Road, #01-01 Singapore Pools Building, Singapore 188994. Prizes up to \$5,000 per winning ticket can also be claimed at all Singapore Pools branches and authorised retailers.				
● Visit Pools website at www.singaporepools.com.sg for full Sweep results and number checker.				

Verstappen tipped for c’ship challenge

LONDON • Max Verstappen is the driver five-time Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton and Ferrari’s Sebastian Vettel will “fear the most” this season.

That was the assertion of his Red Bull boss Christian Horner, who told reporters on Tuesday the team could “provide him the tools to do the job”.

He said: “Max, if you look at his performance in the second half of the (last) year, was the second-highest points scorer to Lewis.

“I don’t think he lacks anything that they have.”

Hamilton won 11 races for Mercedes on his way to the title while four-time world champion Vettel of Germany finished as runner-up with five victories, ahead of Verstappen, who won two grands prix last year and ended the season fourth overall.

But Horner expressed his confidence that the Dutchman, who became the sport’s youngest winner when he won the 2016 Spanish Grand Prix at the age of 18, would be their heir apparent.

The Briton said of the 21-year-old, who is now the main man at Red Bull following Australian Daniel Ricci-



Max Verstappen’s Red Bull boss Christian Horner says that the Dutchman is the driver Lewis Hamilton and Sebastian Vettel will “fear the most” this season. PHOTO: AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

cardo’s departure for Renault: “His maturity has increased, we saw that during the course of last year.

“He’s just much more rounded through experience. He’s just more worldly, more experienced, he’s just in a better place to be able to deal with the pressures that are placed on him.”

Although Mad Max’s fiery reputation again preceded him after he was ordered to do two days of public service for shoving Racing

Point’s Esteban Ocon following the Brazil race, Horner insisted he had seen “the other side of the fence” after doing one day by accompanying the stewards at a Formula E race in Morocco last month.

He added: “He came back and went, ‘Crikey, these guys have got difficult decisions to make. Whether you penalise or not’. That was actually a useful exercise for him.”

Red Bull’s new partnership with

Honda will also be key to Verstappen’s championship bid.

In November, the Austrian team ended an 11-year partnership with Renault, whose engines powered them to four successive driver and constructor title doubles between 2010 and 2013.

The V6 turbo hybrid era brought about the eventual parting of ways, and Horner felt that for the past three seasons, Red Bull had “effectively been paying for a first-class ticket” yet they got “an economy seat” in return.

While Honda had a troubled time with McLaren before their separation before the start of last term, he revealed that the Japanese company had shown good progress, and Red Bull were aiming to be more consistent across all circuits this year. REUTERS

Murray could return for Wimbledon

LONDON • Andy Murray’s chances of returning to competitive tennis should be “in the high 90 per cent” and he could even play at Wimbledon this year, according to Professor Derek McMinn, the surgeon who invented the hip operation that the former world No. 1 underwent last week.

Rather than the more common total hip replacement, Murray now has a metal Birmingham hip resurfacing (BHR) device on his right side, designed to allow greater activity after surgery.

His implant is a metal-on-metal device that should last for at least two decades.

A recent survey showed that for men under 50 at the time of the operation, 98.5 per cent of the implants would still be functioning 21 years after surgery.

Men under 40 are much more likely to be able to engage in regular high-impact sporting activity. The time needed to attempt a return to competitive sport depends on the individual patient and, in particular, the quality of bone around the implant.

But highly active patients, such as Murray, usually have better bone quality.

“We are generally cautious about returning too early to impact sport

after BHR, being afraid of the patient getting a femoral neck fracture,” McMinn said. “Activity promotes strong bone, and inactivity usually associated with an arthritic hip weakens the femoral neck.

“It is highly likely Murray’s bone quality is normal or near normal. With a fair wind, he should be able to play at Wimbledon this year.”

The BHR procedure was developed as an alternative to total hip replacement, conserving more of the bone and restoring the natural shape of the joint, allowing for greater levels of activity and a broader range of movement.

THE TIMES, LONDON

SPORT

HAVING THE RIDE OF A LIFETIME

Murphy can now cycle 100km in 4 hours after taking part in OCBC's learn-to-ride course

Laura Chia

This time last year, Tania Murphy could barely mount a bicycle or cycle even a metre without falling down.

But, after participating in OCBC Cycle's learn-to-ride programme Project Training Wheels (PTW) last March, the credit analyst is now an avid cyclist.

The 31-year-old joined a cycling club and cycles up to 90km every weekend. In December, Murphy cycled 100km in four hours, beginning her ride in Raffles Place, passing by Kranji and Mandai before finishing at Gardens by the Bay.

Nominated by her husband Glen for PTW, Murphy said the couple could not do many activities on holiday together because of her inability to cycle.

"The main objective was to find a

common sport we can do together," she said.

The couple enjoyed their first overseas ride together in Ireland last April before participating in the OCBC Cycle a month later.

"We celebrated my birthday and cycled in freezing cold weather, so that was memorable," said Murphy, who may sign up again this year if her schedule allows it.

"I really enjoy cycling because it's a very social sport. You can do it with a lot of friends and get fit together.

"To know how to cycle is useful because sometimes you're lazy to walk and Singapore has excellent park connectors that give you a safe base for cycling. It's an inexpensive sport and a good way to get fit."

Describing her experience in the programme, she said: "PTW was excellent and the coaches were excellent. Many people were afraid of fall-



Tania Murphy picked up cycling last year through OCBC Cycle's learn-to-ride programme Project Training Wheels after being nominated by her husband. Now an avid cyclist, she cycles up to 90km every weekend. She is looking to take part in the OCBC Cycle's 42km Sportive Ride next year. PHOTO COURTESY OF TANIA MURPHY

ing down, but I wasn't afraid as I knew that it was just part of the experience.

"Once I accepted that I was going to fall at some point, that helped me. After that, I just kept on practising. If you go slowly, you will get better and more confident."

After last year's OCBC Cycle, Murphy set a goal of completing 100km in four hours to improve her riding speed. She was cycling at an aver-

age 23kmh while her more experienced friends averaged 30kmh.

"I have very encouraging friends who were willing to go on slow and short rides with me initially but, over time, I created this goal for myself because I thought 25kmh was achievable," she said.

Her training routine includes riding 30-60km every weekend and cycling on a stationary bike at home every weekday morning.

"It was not easy at all. I fell five times in six months. But I'd set this goal so I really need to accomplish it because I'll feel terrible if I don't," she said.

Despite achieving her goal in December, Murphy said she still has plenty to work on as she targets the OCBC Cycle's 42km Sportive Ride next year and a 140km ride around Singapore.

"I've only recently learnt how to

drink water while I'm still on the bike, so I still have a lot to learn. I still don't know how to pedal while standing up on my bike and I'm terrible on hilly terrain," she said.

claura@sph.com.sg

• The OCBC Cycle will be held on May 11 and 12 at the Singapore Sports Hub. Register at ocbccycle.com with early-bird discounts until Feb 12.

Obituaries

FOR BOOKINGS AND ENQUIRIES, call 1800-289-9988 or 6319-5192

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." *Psalms 23:6*



Ng Yew Tiang

Age: 98

Was called home to be with the Lord on 6 February 2019.

Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Chua Oon Yang (deceased)

Sons:
Ng Wee Kiang
Ng Wee Ming
Ng Wee Kee

Daughters:
Ng Chay Boon
Ng Lee Boon (deceased)
Ng Siew Boon

Grandchildren:
Adrian Ng
Aaron Ng
Ng Yu Shao
Ng Yu Xun
Ng Yu Jia
Victoria Ng
Nicole Ng
Ko Chee Yee
Ko Hwee Ngee
Lee Seng Teck
Lee Hui Min
Joel Lim
John Lim
Jeriel Lim (deceased)

Daughters-in-law:
Amy Ong
Cho Chew Keuk
Chan Wai Lun

Sons-in-law:
Ko Swee Hee
Lee Hock Cheong
Lim Hwee Tat

Spouses:
Lai Yen Yen
Katherine Ooi

And all relatives and friends.
Wake is held at Singapore Funeral Parlour Level 4, Orchid Room, 91 Tampines Link, Singapore 528746. Nightly services will be held at 8.00pm. Cortège leaves on Saturday 9 February 2019 at 9.45am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 for cremation at 10.45am.

**Carin Tham
Hans Wong - Jensen
Great-Grandchildren:
Adele Ng
Aldric Ng
Trevor Ko**

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." *2 Timothy 4:7*



Tan Lucy

Age: 98
1921 - 2019

Was called home to the Lord on 5 February 2019. Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Husband: Joseph Lee Khiam Teck (†)

Sons:
Lawrence Lee
Peter Lee
Christopher Lee

Daughters:
Mary Lee
Cecilia Lee

Grandchildren:
Sophia Tan
Benjamin Tan
Ann-Marie Lee
Bernadette Lee
Vivienne Lee
Winnie Lee

Daughters-in-law:
Julia Chang
Evelyn Kang
Florence Tay

Son-in-law:
Clarence Tan

Grandson-in-law:
Goh Wai Fu

Caregiver:
Ria Rustanti

And all relatives and friends.
Wake is held at St Joseph Dying Aid Association, Oratory prayer room 2, 1259 Upper Serangoon Road, Singapore 534795. (Entrance via Hougang Avenue 8, Opposite Punggol Park) Nightly prayers will be held at 8.00pm. Cortège leaves on Saturday 9 February 2019 at 9.30am for Funeral Mass at St Anne's Church, 66 Sengkang East Way, Singapore 548593 at 10.00am, thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 11.25am.



USHA RANI

Our loving Mother & Badi Mummy



Pinnacle of our family, she will be missed by three generations whom she lovingly nurtured. We will always remember her smile, that lit a thousand rooms.

Passed away peacefully on Wednesday 6 February 2019

Children/ Spouses:
Renu & Ranjit ; Arun & Vandana; Arvind & Shida ; Shobha; Sunita & Late, Ram Singh ; Sharda & Satish ; Sunil & Aarti

Grandchildren, Great-Grandchildren, Relatives & Friends.
Cortège will leave at 3pm on 8 February 2019 from **187 TANJONG RHU RD, #12-08 SANCTUARY GREEN, S436925** for cremation at Mandai Crematorium, Hall 1, 5pm.

ANTIM ARDAS
will be held at Silat Road Gurdwara, 17 February 2019, 5 - 6pm
For more information, please call 92378620

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Death announcements in The Straits Times are now digitised to make it easier for the deceased's next-of-kin to share news of the demise of their loved one.

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life

D **TAKING AIM**
Jack Neo gunning
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D5



Yee Miao Ling, 30

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NICHE ACTS ARE HOT

**Boutique gig promoters bring
in more non-mainstream acts
than before and inject
diversity into the music scene**



Anjali Raguraman

While Singapore has played host to big-name performers such as British singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran and American singer-songwriter Bruno Mars, a group of boutique concert promoters is looking beyond familiar names and injecting diversity to the live music scene here.

In the past three years, the likes of Collective Minds, Figure8 Agency and Symmetry Entertainment are searching out and bringing in acts that established promoters would not typically bank on.

Events agency Collective Minds is responsible for acts ranging from American rapper Kyle and legendary English DJ Nightmares on Wax to Cameroonian bassist Richard Bona and British comedian-rapper Big Shaq.

Among the several acts it has lined up for the next two months is New Yorker Mac Ayres, a self-taught producer, singer, and multi-instrumentalist, best known for his soulful R&B tunes.

Similarly, Symmetry Entertainment is responsible for bringing in acts as far out as psychedelic Texas trio Khruangbin and British indie pop group Superorganism, with American indie rock singer-songwriter Mitski due to play here later this month.

Niche acts are also the go-to for Figure8 Agency, who last year brought in Malian musical duo Amadou & Mariam, and Grammy-winning desert blues band Tinariwen.

Such shows are typically held at small or mid-sized venues, with the usual suspects being spaces such as Kilo Lounge, The Pavilion at Far East Square, Esplanade Annexe Studio, Capitol Theatre and the Esplanade Concert Hall.

For all three promoters, tickets for

shows range from about \$30 for a club gig to an upper limit of about \$100 for shows in bigger venues.

"With non-mainstream acts, it is tougher to accurately gauge the turnout for the show, which presents a financial risk," says Mr Tim Kek, 27, founder of Symmetry Entertainment and co-founder of Moonbeats Asia, which focuses more on electronic music. "But the higher the risk, the higher the reward."

For instance, both nights of its show with British electronic duo Honne at the Capitol Theatre next month have sold out. The venue typically holds about 1,000 people.

By casting a wide net for acts and not sticking to one genre, as well as pairing the act with the right venue size, Collective Minds co-founder Zaran Vachha, 32, is hedging his bets. "We've also really honed ourselves in on the scale of acts we do because we're not going after the huge Indoor Stadium shows," he says.

Attendance-wise, he says the majority of his shows here have "missed the mark only by 15 to 20 per cent, up or down, of what I predicted".

"With that margin for error, if we slip up, it hurts us only a little bit."

Like Collective Minds and Symmetry Entertainment, Figure8 Agency director Dany Inthaxoum, 34, says there is demand in Singapore and it is meeting it with the acts it brings in.

"In the last three years, I feel there have been a lot of new offerings (for music acts) because people have access to streaming services, they read online publications and they keep track of what's interesting," she says. "We are trying to reach out to these people who are frustrated that the artists they love aren't coming here."

Giggoers like 29-year-old Shaun Sandhu, who works in corporate investigations, describes the kind of music he is into as "the intersection among jazz, R&B and electronic music" and his top Spotify genres include indietronica and indie R&B.

Before these promoters came around, he says: "(I) couldn't get my fill of acts I really wanted to see. Instead, I would go for acts which were more firmly fixed in one genre, such as old-school jazz gigs or electronic acts that were verging on EDM (electronic dance music)."

But he now averages about one show a month by Collective Minds, Symmetry Entertainment or Moonbeats Asia.

"I'd have never expected Collective Minds to bring in Jordan Rakei and FKJ, for example," he says. "Despite their talent, they're not what most people would consider 'danceable' and don't have brand-name recognition."

He also feels these niche promoters are a vital part of Singapore's music scene, helping to blur the edges between genres and facilitate experimentation.

"If Singapore's music scene were an arid desert country punctuated by vibrant cities, (promoters like) Collective Minds would be the merchant caravan connecting those cities."

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Showcasing different genres of music

COLLECTIVE MINDS

Tickets to Canadian crooner Daniel Caesar's debut show here last March at The Pavilion at Far East Square sold out in seven minutes.

Two more shows by Caesar were announced and they sold out in a minute and a day respectively.

"We're booking the shows of the artists people are listening to," says Mr Zaran Vachha, 32, co-founder of events agency Collective Minds, which brought in Caesar.

"Of course people want to see Beyonce and Ed Sheeran, but if you delve into what people listen to on a daily basis, it's people like Caesar and FKJ."

FKJ, which is short for French Kiwi Juice, is a multi-instrumentalist, singer and musician from France.

Mr Vachha adds: "It might not be the mass population, but there's definitely a population and it's due to things like Spotify and YouTube... They'll listen to one

track and it'll open a gateway to a whole genre or style of music."

The sold-out shows are a testament to the viability of bringing niche acts to Singapore.

Mr Vachha moved to Singapore from Hong Kong about two years ago to start Collective Minds, and the company now organises shows across Asia, including Malaysia, Jakarta, Hong Kong and Seoul.

When it comes to curating acts, he believes that no one likes just one genre of music.

Collective Minds organises five to six shows a month in Singapore alone. This could mean Canadian electro-funk duo Chromeo playing a DJ set at Kilo Lounge one week or British singer Craig David combining a DJ set with live singing at Zouk.

Part of the reason the company has so many shows is that Mr Vachha wants people to go out for gigs on a regular basis and hopes for this to become "the norm".

"If you think about cities like Lon-

don or New York, sometimes there's almost too much to choose from in terms of the number of gigs... Singapore should also be considered one of those centres of the world, with so much culture going through it."

He admits that deciding which acts to book is based on "feeling". He also looks to artists who are gaining traction in London or the United States.

That said, he also wants to book acts people do not expect, like acclaimed American jazz musician Kamasi Washington, who played to a crowd of more than 1,000 people here in August last year.

It is also apparent that tastes here are shifting. Mr Vachha says: "I would have never booked him here two years ago for a standalone concert, but we filled the whole floor of the Capitol Theatre."

"You would never expect a young Singapore audience to be into that."

[MORE STORIES on D2](#)



Collective Minds, co-founded by Mr Zaran Vachha (above), organised three sold-out shows in Singapore by Canadian crooner Daniel Caesar (top) last year. PHOTOS: COLLECTIVE MINDS & IAN LIM, COURTESY OF ZARAN VACHHA

**We are trying to
reach out to these
people who are
frustrated that
the artists they love
aren't coming here.**



**FIGURE8 AGENCY DIRECTOR DANY
INTHAXOUM**

FROM D1



Ms Dany Inthaxoum (above) is the director at Figure8 Agency, which brought acts such as Tinariwen (right), a Grammy Award-winning group of Tuareg musicians from the Sahara Desert, to Singapore. PHOTOS: FIGURE8 AGENCY, XAVIER MARLE



Eclectic music rarely heard in Singapore

FIGURE8 AGENCY

Since its inception in 2011, Figure8 Agency has brought in an eclectic mix of acts from French electronic music duo Justice to Tinariwen, a Grammy Award-winning group of Tuareg musicians from the Sahara Desert. The agency, which does artist bookings, concert productions and music consulting, was started by Ms Dona Inthaxoum, 34, and two friends from the music industry. Ms Inthaxoum's twin sister Dany joined later as a director. The group, whose members are all French, started doing shows here because it thought "there were no exciting shows in Singapore at the time", says Ms Dany Inthaxoum. While it has staged shows featuring South-east Asian acts, the majority of acts it brings in are French to target the large French expatriate population here. But eight years on, the success of shows like Tinariwen's, which drew an equal mix of locals and expatriates, is still surprising to Ms Inthaxoum. "Tinariwen are international, but still niche because it's world music... So, we were very surprised that more than 1,000 people came to the show at the Esplanade," she says. That said, the numbers game is not the main goal for the group. "We don't have the objective of doing a show that brings 1,000 people every time. We just want to do a show that brings good music to Singapore," she says. Next up in its line-up is French-Cuban duo Ibeyi, made up of twin sisters Lisa-Kainde and Naomi Diaz, who sing in English, French and the Nigerian language, Yoruba. The duo, who also featured in the short film that accompanied Beyonce's 2016 album Lemonade, will play here on April 20, at a venue that is yet to be announced.

Anjali Raguraman



Mr Tim Kek's (above) Symmetry Entertainment and Moonbeats Asia have organised gigs by British indie pop group Superorganism (left), among others, in Singapore. PHOTOS: SYMMETRY ENTERTAINMENT

Chance for local acts to share stage with international artists

SYMMETRY ENTERTAINMENT AND MOONBEATS ASIA

Symmetry Entertainment founder and Moonbeats Asia co-founder Tim Kek, 27, feels that as a promoter, it is important for him to represent the sort of music he personally enjoys when bringing shows in. "Without the heart, I wouldn't know how to properly sell the event or the artist," he says. Last year, he arranged for Norwegian indie pop-rock artist Boy Pablo, American post-rock band This Will Destroy You and British indie pop group Superorganism, among others, to perform here.

He started the company seven years ago while on a gap year before he was due to enter university in Britain. "I put together some events for artists I enjoyed listening to but that no one was bringing in to play shows here, although they were constantly going to other Asian countries like Japan and Thailand." His first shows were with British DJ-producer Star Slinger and American indie rock group Beach Fossils at the now-defunct Home Club in Upper Circular Road. Since "cold e-mailing bands, agents and managers" in the early days, he has gone on to stage fairly large-scale shows, like that of Ice-

landic folk-pop band Of Monsters and Men at The Coliseum, Hard Rock Hotel, in 2016. More than 4,000 people attended the show. Since niche acts have been made more accessible by promoters like him over the years, he has noticed a younger crowd at some of his shows. The live music experience is also trickling down to the next generation. "Sometimes, we even see parents bringing their kids and enjoying the music together," he adds. With the platform he has, Mr Kek is also conscious of having local artists share the stage with international bands, as this exposes people to more local music.

For instance, local "bedroom pop" crooner Shye opened for Superorganism at their Jan 11 show. "It also provides the local act with the opportunity to learn from and, hopefully, take note of the professionalism of these international bands who are used to touring and performing around the world," he says. Ultimately, he says it is important for him "to create a safe space for young Singaporeans to come out to enjoy music, and pave the way for the next generation to inject their creativity into the robust scene of Singapore, as I did".

Anjali Raguraman

Celebrate the Art of Living and Leaving Well

The author, Dr William Wan, General Secretary of the Singapore Kindness Movement, will share his unique insights from his book, **THROUGH THE VALLEY**, on how people can age gracefully. He will be joined by The Straits Times Senior Correspondent Lee Siew Hua.

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A natural evolution for Backstreet Boys



POP
DNA
Backstreet Boys
RCA
★★★★☆

Perhaps the best indication of how the Backstreet Boys have managed to straddle both their old and new selves on their ninth and latest album DNA is the song Breathe. The a cappella track is a showcase of their sublime, five-part harmonies that are still as flawless, 23 years since the group debuted. While it is a callback to the a cappella tracks like I'll Never Break Your Heart, which the boyband kicked off their career with, it is a perfectly up-to-date pop ballad. That said, DNA is no nostalgic trip and it is clear that the group – made up of AJ McLean, Howie Dorough, Nick Carter, Kevin Richardson and Brian Littrell – are taking chances. There is also a notable conscious



Backstreet Boys' (from far left) Nick Carter, Brian Littrell, AJ McLean, Howie Dorough and Kevin Richardson performed at the National Stadium in October 2017. PHOTO: ST FILE

attempt at bringing Backstreet Boys up to date. Album opener Don't Go Breaking My Heart is filled with bright synthesizers while Nobody Else is layered with lush, electronic production. The country-pop influences are apparent too, on solid tracks like No Place, Just Like You Like It and Chances, which is bolstered by songwriting credits of One Republic frontman Ryan Tedder and pop star Shawn Mendes.

But there are also the sub-par pop numbers like Is It Just Me and the occasional tacky lyrics ("Who are you? The sex police?") on the likes of New Love. That said, DNA is a work that does not feel like it is trying too hard to fit into the current pop music sphere. Instead, it is a natural evolution, befitting of this boyband turned man band.

Anjali Raguraman

From deathcore to catchy tunes

British band Bring Me the Horizon embrace pop, hip-hop and electronic sounds in their sixth album, Amo



ROCK
AMO
Bring Me the Horizon
Sony / RCA
★★★★☆

Eddino Abdul Hadi

British band Bring Me the Horizon veer even further from their left-field deathcore/metalcore roots to take on an even more eclectic palette, embracing pop, hip-hop and electronic sounds in their sixth album, Amo.

It is a brave move. Fans of heavier genres are not known to take too kindly to bands who abandon their aurally aggressive past for catchy melodies and trade live instruments for synthesizers and DAWs (Digital Audio Workstations).

The fact that Amo became the Sheffield quintet's first album to top the British charts only fuels the accusations that the band have sold out.

Still, Amo stands as the work of a band unafraid to go beyond their boundaries. In the process, they have also revealed their knack for catchy songwriting.

There is little of frontman Oli Sykes' trademark screams and screeches and instead of shouting along, fans at the live gigs might find themselves singing a lot more to the new tunes.

Amo is more than prepared to take on detractors. The self-referential Heavy Metal is anything but its title ("Cause some kid on the 'gram said he used to be a fan/But this s*** ain't heavy metal/And that's alright"). Rahzel from American hip-hop band The Roots beatboxes on the bridge and Sykes cheekily ends the songs with a scream reminiscent of the band's sound from 15 years ago.



cent of the band's sound from 15 years ago.

The band collaborate with art-pop singer Grimes on the retro, faux-Eurodance track Nihilist Blues, while Fresh Bruises, one of the album's electronic interludes, is designed like an electronic dance music (EDM) track, complete with build-ups and a drop, with Sykes adopting a falsetto that he utilises several times in the rest of the album.

Mother Tongue, quite possibly the first track from the band that will not feel out of place in an EDM

festival, is even catchier, complete with euphoric choral chants.

An orchestral string section sits next to glitchy electronics and a full-on guitar solo on album closer I Don't Know What To Say, a touching tribute from Sykes to a close friend who died of cancer.

The frontman lets on a lot more about himself, including his past and present love life, in the rest of the songs.

There are plenty of references to his turbulent and short marriage to tattoo artist Hannah Pixie Snow-

don, as well as his current marriage to Brazilian model Alissa Salls (hence the album title, Portuguese for love).

Wonderful Life, which features vocals from black metal band Cradle Of Filth's Dani Filth, is a rumination on a quarter-life crisis, with Sykes singing about being "domesticated, still a little feral", which, perhaps, could also be taken as a dig on the band's new musical direction.

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Etta James' bluesy belt



JAZZ
ASOULFUL
SUNDAY: LIVE AT THE LEFT BANK
Etta James with the Cedar Walton Trio

Reel To Real Recordings

★★★★☆

Jazz devotees tend to be dedicated to the point of obsession and later generations of music fans have reason to thank them for the seemingly endless supply of bootlegs as demonstrated in this latest example of an archival recording.

The Left Bank Jazz Society in Baltimore was founded by two fans Vernon L. Welsh and Benny Kearsce. It brought in a series of jazz acts to Baltimore's Famous Ballroom and Welsh recorded many tapes, one of which is the source for this one-night gig.

The concert united singer Etta James with pianist Cedar Walton, bassist Sam Jones and drummer Billy Higgins in 1972.

James, whose bluesy belt was delivered with a slightly nasal timbre that recalled Billie Holiday's idiosyncratic vibe, never quite achieved the star status critics thought she deserved. Listen to her astringent take on You Better Go Now, much more acerbic than Lady Day's wistfully romantic take, and you hear the distinct edge she brings to her interpretation. She is not cuddly, but there is a vibrant clarity to her singing that strips away superficial pop frills for spine-tingling truth.

Pianist Walton is a great match for her gutsy singing, especially on Burt Bacharach's This Guy's In Love With You, where they leach any hint of saccharine sentimentality out of this 1968 pop hit, highlighting instead its elegant melody line.

James might deliver a killer imitation of Lady Day on Don't Go To Strangers, but it's evident from this live set that she has a voice all her own.

Ong Sor Fern

A guiding light through tumult



INDIE FOLK
OLYMPIC GIRLS
Tiny Ruins
Ba Da Bing Records
★★★★☆

Yeow Kai Chai



The last time New Zealand band Tiny Ruins was here in Singapore, it was frontman Hollie Fullbrook (left) all by herself and her acoustic guitar. With her strums and distinct, caramel voice, she opened the 2015 Singapore Writers Festival at The Arts House with the world premiere of a beautiful composition.

The song was A Million Flowers, now the eighth track in her band's third album, Olympic Girls. It also happens to be the springboard for a more experimental direction, the "visual template" inspired by the torrent of blooms in a Van Gogh painting.

Hear the difference between the earlier live stripped-down version and the fuller studio one. "In a still

moment after the rush hour/'Let's play' your motto on the Yamanote Line," she sings, swaying with the tug and release of the melody.

"Catch everyone in a hurry/Sharing our days in the sun/Blossoms all starting to fall," she sings, as the ruddy, undulating rhythm gains steam, slows, then ratchets up again. The listener is buoyed along by tempo shifts, driven by a flourish of keys, percussion and back-up vocals, into uncharted territory.

That suspense, discreet it may be, is sustained throughout the record and you wait for each phrase, good news or bad.

This tougher stance is precipitated by a period beset by exhaustion, writer's block and a personal tragedy – she suffered a miscarriage in 2017. Olympic Girls, thus, represents a re-alignment, a restart and a lucid reckoning with life and death.

Her voice, confidently unshowy and disarming, is unafraid to go even lower this time. In the title track, she alludes to transience and chance. "Stirring, shaken, all of us waking/Under the same cover of sky/You said my freedom feels/Like a white lie," she sings, her voice almost bruised when it comes to the word "lie".

In between mellifluous cascades of guitars and drums are quieter, starker interludes. "You'll never find a thing/If you can't lose yourself/Every once in a while," she realises, before the melody shape-shifts and takes you away into somewhere unknown.

In How Much, she describes an actual meltdown in Los Angeles. "Break-down in the supermarket/Something for my toothache/Is it getting dark yet?" she sings against increasingly gnarled guitar-work. "How much would you be willing to give?" she asks and there is no answer.

Reliably, her voice is the guiding light through the tumult. An excellent raconteur, she is adept at painting portraiture with a few deft strokes. She uses her rarefied register sparingly and effectively, such as in the song Sparklers, singing about writing someone's "name in cursive on the air" and "conjuring no lasting magic".

Or listen to the dreamlike Holograms where she battles the Grim Reaper and gives him "the slip/Saved by a Darth Vader novelty helmet". It's a treatise on mortality dressed as a surreal sci-fi romance, as she pronounces the title with a languorous sigh.

Music Charts

APPLE MUSIC

- (1) 7 Rings – Ariana Grande
- (2) Thank U, Next – Ariana Grande
- (3) Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse) – Post Malone and Swae Lee
- (4) Without Me – Halsey
- (5) Sweet But Psycho – Ava Max
- (6) Everything I Need – Skylar Grey
- (9) Dancing With A Stranger – Sam Smith and Normani
- (8) Solo – Jennie
- (9) Love Someone – Lukas Graham
- (7) A Kind Of Sorrow – A-lin

• For the week of Feb 4 in Singapore

BILLBOARD

- (-) 7 Rings – Ariana Grande
- (1) Without Me – Halsey
- (2) Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse) – Post Malone and Swae Lee
- (5) Thank U, Next – Ariana Grande
- (3) Sicko Mode – Travis Scott
- (4) High Hopes – Panic! At The Disco
- (6) Happier – Marshmello and Bastille
- (9) Wow. – Post Malone
- (7) Girls Like You – Maroon 5 featuring Cardi B
- (8) Drip Too Hard – Lil Baby and Gunna

• For the week of Feb 2

HIT FM

- (10) Half A Life – Ashin
- (2) Ugly Beauty – Jolin Tsai
- (-) Windy – Wu Ching-feng
- (5) Kisses For The World – Tanya Chua
- (1) Talent – Joker Xue
- (12) I'm Fine – Apple Kho
- (3) A Half Is Me – Chen Linong
- (-) Make A Turn In Front – Neko Highway
- (8) Fake Monk – Khalil Fong
- (7) Forever Young – Eve Ai

• For the week ending Jan 27

SPOTIFY

- (1) 7 Rings – Ariana Grande
- (3) Dancing With A Stranger – Sam Smith and Normani
- (2) Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse) – Post Malone and Swae Lee
- (6) I'm So Tired – Lauv and Troye Sivan
- (7) Way Back Home – Shaun, Conor Maynard and Sam Feldt
- (4) Without Me – Halsey
- (5) Thank U, Next – Ariana Grande
- (8) Sweet But Psycho – Ava Max
- (10) Saturday Nights – Khalid
- (-) Solo – Jennie

• For the week ending Feb 6

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40 YEARS OF GREAT MUSIC

Building on enduring themes

Team behind The Lego Movie 2 says the film's message about learning to get along is suitable for the young and old

Alison de Souza
In Los Angeles

Everything Is Awesome – that was the semi-ironic title of the catchy, borderline annoying and Oscar-nominated theme tune from The Lego Movie (2014).

It also happened to sum up the glass-half-full worldview of Emmet, the irrepressible Lego hero voiced by Chris Pratt.

But five years on, the sequel to the critical and commercial hit – an inventive computer-animated tale about Lego figures that earned US\$469 million globally – has grown up somewhat. And its more nuanced outlook is that everything is not quite so awesome and certainly not awesome all the time.

Opening in Singapore today, The Lego Movie 2 sees Emmet and other former inhabitants of Bricksburg – the Lego city he saved from destruction in the first film – living in a Mad Max-style wasteland known as Apocalypseburg.

They are under constant threat from alien invaders made out of Lego Duplo, the bigger Lego bricks for younger children.

These, the original movie revealed, are the creation of a little girl named Bianca. Emmet's world is constructed by her older brother, Finn, and events in the Lego universe may or may not be playing out solely in the children's minds.

But whatever the metaphysics of this world, Pratt and other voice actors, along with writer-producers Phil Lord and Chris Miller, tell The Straits Times the bigger message is about the need to grow up and learn to get on with others – no matter how old one is.

At a recent press day in Hollywood, Pratt – star of the Guardians Of The Galaxy superhero franchise (2014 to 2017) and Jurassic World films (2015 and 2018) – says there are both perennial and timely ideas here about how to deal with others if you clash.

"The great thing about relevant themes in stories is that they're kind of eternal, so they're relevant now but they probably would've been relevant 20 years ago," says the 39-year-old.

"Some of those themes would be that it doesn't matter who started it; we're better when we stick together; and we shouldn't be quick to be defensive and isolated, because making the circle around us smaller to exclude people will ultimately end with us being alone."



"In order to not be alone, we have to include people with whom we sometimes disagree," says the star, who is engaged to self-help author Katherine Schwarzenegger, 29, and has a six-year-old son with ex-wife and actress Anna Faris, 42.

Elizabeth Banks plays Emmet's best friend Lucy, a brooding pragmatist who does not share Emmet's "let's all get along" philosophy.

But to The Pitch Perfect 2 (2015) director and The Hunger Games (2012 to 2015) star, the film is more about the relationship between the young architects of this universe.

"It's really about this boy growing up and having to play with his sister. At the end of the first movie, the Duplo (bricks) come in and we brought in that sister energy and references to things that she loves in her life – glitter and stickers – and the fact she has this big open heart still."

Banks has sons aged eight and six and is married to sports writer Max Handelman, 45.

What did the screenwriters intend? Ask Lord and Miller if the story is a metaphor for the real world and they smile inscrutably.

But they do have a meta narrative, says Miller, 43. "When we start with these movies, the first (thing) we think about is what we want to say about the world, what do we want to put out there, what are the themes we want to walk through – and we build the story off of that.

"Because it takes years to make these things, so it has to feel like it's about something."

And as the characters are now five years older, it made sense that "they've discovered some things in their lives are not awesome", says Lord, 43.

"And that's a real challenge for a young person to figure out. How do I acknowledge that, but not lose the optimistic part of myself?

"Because Everything Is Awesome is a wonderful song, but it's not quite nuanced enough to be accurate," Miller says. "So we're trying to give a little more of a sophisticated understanding of what that song's real message is."

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• The Lego Movie 2 opens in Singapore today.



Actor Chris Pratt (above with co-star Tiffany Haddish) reprises his role as Emmet in The Lego Movie 2 (top). PHOTOS: REUTERS, WARNER BROS

Clichéd portrayals lifted by colourful, fun visuals

REVIEW / ANIMATION COMEDY

THE LEGO MOVIE 2 (PG)

107 minutes/Opens today/★★★★☆

The story: It has been five years since the events of The Lego Movie. Emmet (voiced by Chris Pratt) and other former inhabitants of Bricksburg – the Lego city he saved from destruction in the first movie – are living in a post-apocalyptic wasteland named Apocalypseburg. They are under constant threat from alien invaders made of Lego Duplo, the bigger Lego bricks for younger children.

Jan Lee

Going into the cinema to watch The Lego Movie 2, the target audience of the film was immediately clear: the dozens of children who streamed in with their parents.

The sequel – set five years after 2014's The Lego Movie – had a tough act to follow.

The first movie, a box-office hit, was universally loved and acclaimed. It was also fresh and original, as it was the first film to feature the construction brick toys.

Since then, it has spawned into a successful franchise that includes the spin-offs, The Lego Batman Movie and The Lego Ninjago Movie, which were both released in 2017.

The sequel sees Chris Pratt, Elizabeth Banks, Alison Brie and Will Arnett reprising their roles, and welcomes additions like Tiffany Haddish as an alien queen bent on marrying Batman (Arnett).

The film does its job of satisfying its audience base with exuberant, colourful graphics as well as fun and over-the-top pop songs.

But the story comes off as rather trite.

The film is anchored on a sibling rivalry – the events of the Lego universe in the first movie are played out by Finn (Jadon Sand) on his father's (Will Ferrell) expansive Lego set and, in the sequel, his younger sister, Bianca (Brooklyn Prince), is now allowed to play with Lego.

But the emotional pay-off is rather weak, with a predictable twist and clichéd, simplistic portrayals of the siblings.

In the movie, boys are painted as grumpy and loving black, while girls adore pink and glitter. Yes, this is a kids' movie but surely the characterisations can go a little deeper beyond stereotypes.

While the core story was weak, the visual richness of the movie will no doubt entertain children and a number of adults. There was still the novelty of seeing Lego toys in live action on the big screen.

I have no doubt the film will entertain children by virtue of its visual richness, which I also enjoyed as an adult.

Lego characters from different universes – from Justice League superheroes to dinosaurs – appear in a range of different environments, from cities and suburbia to apocalyptic wastelands and alien planets.

But this is not purely a kids' movie. There are moments of self-awareness with references and jokes that only adults would get. For example, a reference near the end of the film to British band Radiohead, a leading rock act in the 1990s.

Do stay for the hilarious closing credit sequence, which features a six-minute song about, well, getting the audience to stay right to the end.



Besides writing and directing the 2014 hit, The Lego Movie, film-making duo Chris Miller (left) and Phil Lord also produced Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse (2018). PHOTO: REUTERS

Champions for animation are each other's critics

Film-making duo Phil Lord and Chris Miller have done pretty well with critics across genres, whether it is directing hit live-action movies (21 Jump Street, 2012), producing an acclaimed television series (The Last Man On Earth, 2015 to 2018) or writing and directing box-office-crushing animation (The Lego Movie, 2014).

Aside from one notable blip – they were sacked as the directors of Solo: A Star Wars Story (2018) following creative differences with the studio – they have been largely bulletproof at both the box office and in review columns.

And now they are getting major awards recognition for the genre that first put them on the map, scoring a Golden Globe win and Best Animated Feature Oscar nomination for Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse (2018) earlier this year.

Mainstream movie reviewers have raved about the latter, which the two produced and Lord co-wrote. It has been a global smash and grossed US\$340 million (S\$459 million) worldwide – no mean feat for a self-referential love letter to the Spider-Man comics.

Speaking to The Straits Times in Los Angeles last month, the 43-year-olds speculate that ani-

mated features may finally be getting their due after being dismissed by many as a genre for children or comic-book geeks.

Says Lord: "Certainly, we found that a lot of adults went to see Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse without kids, and so we had a really broad audience base and I think it's just the tip of the iceberg.

"The adult audience for animation has been growing and growing and I love that people are taking animation seriously as a medium to tell all kinds of stories."

Miller adds: "You can tell any type of story you want – it's just a cinematic language."

The genial pair also reveal a bit about their creative partnership and why it works.

"I think we never stop trying to make things better or more interesting or special," says Miller, who is married to former activist Robyn Murgio and has two children.

"Our goal is to give audiences something fresh and unique in everything we do."

The two also motivate each other to excel. "We are each other's harshest critics and if I'm writing a scene, my goal is to make Phil laugh and think that it has something special and important, and vice versa.

"And if we can get it past each

other, then we can get it past anybody."

Adds Lord, who is dating jewellery designer Irene Neuwirth: "We inspire each other. We have different points of view and I love Chris' writing and his point of view. It's different from mine and I feel really lucky I get to ride his coattails to success."

Miller is quick to point out that animated features are collaborations involving many other people too – and that is just how they like it.

"We get to work with a bunch of other really talented film-makers. These (films) are big group things and everybody has to feel inspired in the same direction to match a similar tone and idea. And when we can all get on board rowing in the same direction, it can really lead to special things."

Lord says: "Movies can be autocratic and dictatorships and that's not really how we work. We like to make them in a pluralistic way that takes the best things all the crew members have to offer and celebrate them."

In other words, it means playing well with others, just like the characters in their new Lego movie learn to do. "Exactly. Lego means to play well, after all," says Miller.

Alison de Souza



Gadrick Chin (far left) and Ryan Lian in *Killer Not Stupid*.
PHOTOS: MM2 ENTERTAINMENT

Jack Neo goes big on action

Home-grown director of *Killer Not Stupid* believes the genre has international appeal

Benson Ang
Lifestyle Correspondent

An action-comedy replete with nail-biting gun battles, heart-pounding chase sequences and sleek hand-to-hand combat scenes is not something usually associated with Singaporean director Jack Neo. After all, the director is mainly known for his series *Ah Boys To Men*, which started in 2012, that featured fewer action scenes.

His new movie, *Killer Not Stupid*, which opened in cinemas here and in Malaysia on Tuesday, is full of action because Neo believes the genre has the potential to reach an international audience.

In a telephone interview last week, he also said that he had always admired action-packed films such as *Deadpool* (2016) and the *Ip Man* film trilogy (2008 to 2015).

"Since comedy is my forte, I melded the two genres and did an action-comedy," said the 59-year-old.

Killer Not Stupid is about two assassins, played by Taiwanese stars Jay Shih and Lin Yu-chih, who is better known as Nadou, on their way to complete a final mission before retiring.

Neo acknowledged that working intensively with guns, knives and explosives presented new challenges, such as how to present an

action scene for the camera.

These obstacles were partly why he shot the movie mainly in Taiwan, as he felt the Taiwanese film industry is more developed than Singapore's and allowed him more access to props such as police cars and guns.

"The Taiwanese have also worked on action films for many years. I was even given a catalogue to decide which type of gun I wanted to use in the film," said Neo, who filmed the movie in the second half of last year.

There were also stunt directors he could consult to choreograph the action scenes as well as the freshness of filming overseas.

While Neo does not rule out shooting more projects in Singapore, he said: "I have already made 30 movies – whatever scenery in Singapore I can capture, I have already done so."

Having worked with Taiwanese artists since his days on the 1990s variety show *Comedy Night*, Neo felt there was rapport directing them. "Although they sometimes use certain Chinese words differently from Singaporeans, we could largely get one another's jokes."

Neo pointed to Taiwanese singer-actor Amber An as a standout among his cast. "She is a beautiful, rare talent with great comedic potential," Neo said of An, who plays a ditzy, scatterbrained character.



Nadou (above left) and Jay Shih are two assassins on their way to complete a final mission before retiring.

Lead actor Shih also did not disappoint. "Even though he is a handsome idol, he was game to do scenes which were less glamorous," said Neo, without revealing details.

In a separate telephone interview, Shih said he felt pushed to his limits every day of filming.

"Before working with Neo, other people told me I had to give myself 'wholly' to him. After filming, I realised they were right. His mind works very quickly and I had to use everything I had to keep up," said the 35-year-old, adding that he had to get used to Neo's habit of re-writing the script while on set.

"Whatever script we received was different from the final one used. I had to react so quickly to his adjustments."

Neo explained that he does that to make the film funnier. "I told the actors that they could handle it because their Mandarin was strong," he said.

The director hopes for the movie to be released in Taiwan over the next few months.

And as for his future projects, Neo plans to start production on the drama *Long Long Time Ago 3* after Chinese New Year and work on more action films.

"Basically, I want to try everything," he said. "I might also think of doing a sci-fi film one day, but I will need time to get the budget."

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● *Killer Not Stupid* is showing in cinemas.

Killer Not Stupid lacks character, structure

REVIEW / COMEDY-THRILLER

KILLER NOT STUPID (PG13)

110 minutes/Now showing/★★☆☆

The story: After two hired killers Hornet (Jay Shih) and Mark (Nadou) finish a job in Singapore, they return to Taiwan, where Hornet hopes to retire. The final job of securing software known as "100K" while fighting off other killers seeking the same thing turns out to be a difficult one. Along the way, they meet the vapid Talia (Amber An) and her protector, Ira (Apple Chan).

John Lui

For director and co-writer Jack Neo, Singapore's most commercially successful film-maker, this movie marks a milestone. This is his first major-budget action-thriller and is filmed mostly in Taiwan, with a pan-Asian cast.

What this Chinese New Year-timed bullet-strewn comedy is not, however, is a work with structure. In Neo style, what is on screen is a collage of scenes, driven by dialogue jokes built on single-gimmick characters.

Malaysian actor Gadrick Chin's Sha Bao thinks he is handsome and talented when he is clearly not, for example; and Taiwanese actress Lin Mei Shiu's assassin boss character mangles English when talking to her Filipino client. She fancies herself as sexually attractive when she is, like Chin's Sha Bao, clearly not, at least in the world of the movie.

This is big-budget Neo, now able to feature fancy drone shots and computer-enhanced pyrotechnics, but the core of his style is there, in how the jokes are a throwback to television-grade cross-talk, or in freakish folk like Chin's Sha Bao.

It feels ungenerous in the moment, even though in the larger arc of the film – and one uses the word "arc" advisedly – Chin's character might, for example, be vindicated. To his credit, Chin is a fine actor whose performance elicits sympathy. His humanity shines through even as he is the grotesque butt of the joke.

The signature humour is now punctuated by extended gunfights and fistfights. These, like the dialogue or plot, feel lightweight and are louder and longer than necessary, but they are at least set in scenic Taiwanese tourist locales like its outdoor markets.

This movie, if nothing else, serves as a nostalgic echo of the big, broad ensemble comedies, high in the goofiness factor, that the Hong Kong film factories used to make during the Chinese New Year period. They faded away as tastes changed and this movie reminds moviegoers why they vanished.

Not enough Jackie Chan in this fantasy comedy

REVIEW / FANTASY ACTION-COMEDY

THE KNIGHT OF SHADOWS: BETWEEN YIN AND YANG (PG)

109 minutes/Now showing/★★★☆☆

The story: The boundary between the world of humans and monsters has collapsed and hordes of demons are pouring into the human realm. A legendary demon hunter (Jackie Chan) defends humanity from an inhuman invasion, aided by a motley group of friendly monsters. He teams up with police detective Fei (Austin Lin) to solve the case involving teenage village girls who have gone missing.

Benson Ang

Tales from the short story collection *Strange Stories From A Chinese Studio* have been adapted into so many films and plays over the decades that yet another movie adaptation would have to be that much different.

And while this latest movie's brilliant computer-generated imagery and Jackie Chan's everyman charm work in its favour, there is still somehow a feeling that moviegoers have seen some of these characters before.



Jackie Chan is demon hunter Pu Songling in *The Knight Of Shadows: Between Yin And Yang*. PHOTO: SHAW ORGANISATION

Chan plays Pu Songling, a demon hunter with a glowing magical calligraphy brush, whose powers are as formidable as they are visually impressive, like being able to summon tentacle-like chains to entrap monsters.

Already known for his martial arts prowess, Chan also shines in physical comedy and imbues his character with a playful sense of humour.

For instance, he uses the brush to draw cat whiskers on a police detective in one scene and falls to the ground after being cut loose from his binds in another.

This is a Jackie Chan everyone knows and loves. Accompanied by a crew of mostly pint-sized friendly demons, he goes on a rollicking adventure through fantasy and legend, filled with stunning backdrops such as a vast torrential sea.

Unfortunately, the movie goes off the rails at the introduction of a secondary plot, which is loosely adapted from the short story of Xiaolian, a female ghost who falls in love with a human scholar.

In this movie, Xiaolian is a beautiful demoness played by Chinese actress Elaine Zhong, who is romantically linked to another demon hunter played by Taiwanese actor Ethan Juan. But despite the pair's idyllic good looks and on-screen chemistry, their tangled love story seems rehearsed from many other films, such as the 1987 and 2011 versions of *A Chinese Ghost Story*, as well as the 1997 animated version.

The result? A tacky melodrama which serves more as a distraction than a major plot line.

It would have been much better if the film had just stuck with the entertaining Chan.

Battle to bring manga warrior to life

Will Lawrence
In London

Robert Rodriguez's right hand flickers across the page. In front of him is a notepad and he drags his pen first one way and then another. Gradually an image emerges. It is a large eye.

"I'm drawing Alita's eyes," he says. "I've been doing it through each interview. You carry on."

Alita is the title character in the American director's new movie, *Alita: Battle Angel*, a big-screen imagining of an innocent yet hugely powerful cyborg who first appeared in the manga graphic novel series by Japanese creator Yukito Kishiro.

The film, which is showing in cinemas here, is a live-action version, blending heavy computer-generated imagery (CGI) with practical sets and real-life actors. And being a manga adaptation, Alita is sporting a pair of enormous peepers.

As we carry on, one wonders if it was a difficult decision to decide on the size of Alita's all-seeing eyes. After all, bringing manga characters to life in live-action form is not an easy proposition.

"Jim Cameron had done the advance work even before I came on board," begins Rodriguez, 50, as his pen continues its merry dance. "He had already been doing paintings and he showed me the script and art of the world he had created for the version he was going to make."

Iconic Canadian film-maker James Cameron, 64, who co-produced and co-wrote the movie, snapped up the film rights just before the turn of the century and had planned to make the picture in 2005, before he began work on *Avatar* (2009).

However, when *Avatar* became an all-consuming labour of love – he is in production on the next four films in the series – he passed his screenplay to Rodriguez to direct.

"Jim's artwork was beautiful stuff," Rodriguez continues, "and the picture that took my breath away was one of Alita where she's looking at her cyborg arms with large manga eyes."

"His work was more like a painting that looked kind of photo-real. He was going to try and make the movie with a photo-real CG character for the first time – in 2005! You can barely do that now. So that was table stakes. They were large eyes and when you saw the eyes, it was like she was a manga character come to life, so we had to honour that."

The character that emerged in Rodriguez's movie is brought to the screen by Canada-born Cuban-American actress Rosa Salazar, 33, who had cut her teeth in the *Divergent* and *Maze Runner* science-fiction film series before starring in the Sandra Bullock Netflix thriller *Bird Box* (2018).

Here, she uses motion-capture performance to bring her cyborg to life.

When she enters the room, Salazar sports very human eyes, although her make-up pushes the effect to Alita-style proportions.

For the actress, this is a key role, a character that might stand as the cornerstone of a long-running franchise should the box-office figures stack up. And as a small, seemingly lost innocent girl who emerges as the most powerful warrior on earth, Alita is a role that will no doubt inspire girls the world over.

The blend of innocence and power in Alita, the actress says,



Based on the manga series created by Yukito Kishiro, *Alita: Battle Angel* stars Christoph Waltz (left) as a scientist who revives Rosa Salazar's cyborg Alita (right). PHOTO: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

speaks to every woman.

"I see it in women all the time," she says. "Women are like a 12-sided die. The motion and attributes and qualities, we all are always code-switching to fit our environments. We are forced to and I see that a lot with women."

With Alita, Salazar says, she was not given what constitutes "a typical character breakdown".

She adds: "Often, when you go for a role, you get told things like: She is hot, but she's bad a**. She is evil, but she is also sweet. But with this role, it wasn't just a simple juxtaposition. There was an incredible spectrum of contradictions. I think that is a realistic portrayal of a woman."

The movie, which blends elements of the first four manga novels, is set in the 23rd century, where a shattering war halted technological progress and left in its wake a society where technology is constantly repurposed.

Alita appears in Iron City, a rich melting pot of war survivors – a city full of ordinary people and the cybernetically-enhanced – when a doctor and technician called Ido (played by Christoph Waltz) finds her core and attaches it to an older cyborg body. Alita then goes on a journey of discovery, emerging as a mighty fighting machine.

The reviews have been mixed. Few critics find fault with the dazzling CGI and effects, but some have criticised a muddled story that seeks to cram too much narrative into a limited running time.

This may be a symptom of one director finishing another's work.

Rodriguez has proved himself in this area, having helmed the horror flick *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996), which Quentin Tarantino originally wrote for himself to direct.

"Jim told me early on that there's

nothing in this movie I haven't already done except the performance-capture and he was going to teach me that. That was cool because, at first, it feels very daunting."

Perhaps the most daunting task, and the part of the movie with which the less positive critics find fault, centres on the screenplay.

Rodriguez faced a mammoth task when Cameron passed on the draft of his script, which was 186 pages long.

"I told them I thought the script really worked and it was great; it just needed to be shorter," Rodriguez recalls.

"I said I wouldn't rewrite it. I would just edit it down. I told Jim I could probably cut 20 or 30 pages... I took out 66 pages and he couldn't tell what I cut. For me, that was the real test. That is why he let me do it, but I didn't know if I could or not and it took about four months to cut that much out."

He says he retained the core of Cameron's story and that it kept its emotional heart. Certainly, whatever the perceived problems with the film, the narrative conforms to Cameron's canon.

It wasn't just a simple juxtaposition. There was an incredible spectrum of contradictions. I think that is a realistic portrayal of a woman.



ACTRESS ROSA SALAZAR on how the role of Alita is a multi-faceted one

As well as the screenplay co-writing credit, he remained a producer on the movie alongside his long-term producing partner Jon Landau.

Landau says: "I think Jim is always exploring reliable human beings and the reason his movies work is that they have themes bigger than their genre."

"We spend too much time in our industry talking about plot. We're obsessed with story instead of theme and yet theme is the emotion you leave the theatre with."

"When Jim does a movie like *Aliens*, it is a mother-daughter love story. That's why Sigourney Weaver's character gets nominated for an Academy award."

"When he's writing *True Lies*, *Titanic*, *Alita*, it is about taking those themes and presenting them in a way where the character is relatable, identifiable, and people can see themselves in the protagonist."

In each movie, Landau says, "there is a heroic quality to his leading characters, a surprise heroic quality because none of them starts out as a hero."

"They become heroes through the experience of his film. It is a reminder that inside each one of us also lies the ability to be a hero. That's what makes a great movie."

The film-makers are happy, especially Rodriguez, who finishes his eyeball sketches as the interviews draw to a close. He scatters them on the table; Alita's huge eyes look up at us.

The critics are unsure whether what they have seen is a great movie. As to whether the film finds favour in the audience's eyes, the jury is still out.

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• Alita: Battle Angel is showing in cinemas.

The daunting tasks film-maker Robert Rodriguez faced to bring *Alita: Battle Angel* to the big screen included trimming James Cameron's 186-page script

Predictable sci-fi tale

REVIEW/SCIENCE-FICTION ADVENTURE

ALITA: BATTLE ANGEL (PG13)
122 minutes/Now showing/★★★☆☆

The story: In the distant future, a scientist discovers a cyborg head in a scrapheap. Dr Ido (Christoph Waltz) revives the creature, and in her new body, Alita (Rosa Salazar) discovers astonishing speed and strength, but she cannot recall her original identity. She becomes a hunter-warrior, who captures and kills cyborg criminals. Meanwhile, sinister forces gather to harm Dr Ido and others to whom she has become close. Based on the manga series by Yukito Kishiro.

John Lui

Unlike the scrapheap pieces picked up by Dr Ido (Waltz) that would become the heroine of the picture, this movie lacks a spine and, very nearly, a brain.

This Hollywood repackaging of a manga favourite buffs away anything that might make it stand out: It waves away questions about the "hard" science of machine-enhanced humans and ignores what might happen in a society divided between the bionic haves and the meat-only have-nots.

What is left is a dully predictable young-adult, coming-of-age tale about a woman with special powers.

Substitute Alita's super-strength with, say, telekinesis or clairvoyance and you would have the formula for any number of

teen-driven dystopia pictures that have washed up with the Hunger Games wave.

What makes the disappointment more crushing is that this is the work of director Robert Rodriguez, who has proven adept at smart, stylish action-thrillers, in works such as *Sin City* (2005) and *Machete* (2010). The pairing of Rodriguez and co-writer James Cameron, the Midas behind science-fiction smashes *The Terminator* (1984) and *Avatar* (2009), may have set expectations sky-high, but in this movie, what becomes obvious is that the real driving force is play-it-safe Hollywood economics.

Cameron's techno-fetishism can pay big dividends – think the two-legged mecha-tanks of *Avatar* – and this film's long shots of Alita's hardware upgrades are part of the same fascination.

The attention paid to the shiny bits is a set-up for the fights, which are impressive for about five minutes. The sequences are made more trite by the frequent "woah" moments from love interest Hugo (Keanu Johnson), a disposable character engineered in the factory that makes non-threatening young males for the entertainment industry.

Cameron and Rodriguez are wizards at world-building, so this failure to cobble together a realm in which trans-humanism comes at a price is puzzling.

When anyone can become Iron Man, the idea of Iron Man as a superhero loses all meaning.

King Of Comedy gets a reboot

Jan Lee

Rebooting a classic and beloved film is always a risky move. But Hong Kong actor-turned-director Stephen Chow was never one to shy away from a challenge.

The 56-year-old, who starred in and directed 1999's *King Of Comedy* about an aspiring actor's trials and tribulations on the road to stardom, chose to feature a female protagonist in a similar role for *The New King Of Comedy*.

The film opened here on Tuesday – the first day of the Chinese New Year.



Hong Kong actor-turned-director Stephen Chow on the set of his new film, *The New King Of Comedy*. PHOTO: SHAW ORGANISATION

Chow says of the new movie: "It's set in a different era and the lead character is now a woman. I find

that the strength of a woman is more restrained, but powerful."

For the lead role, Chow found a

relatively unknown star in 29-year-old Chinese actress E Jingwen.

Speaking about the actress over an e-mail interview, he says: "She has a lot of experience being an extra and playing minor roles, but she has never given up on her dream of being an actress. That fits the story of the character and, of course, her performance was very good. I think I picked the right actress for this part."

Also starring in the movie is Chinese actor Wang Baoqiang, who plays a washed-up movie star.

Chow picked the 34-year-old because his experiences encompass the whole spectrum of stardom. "He's someone who's a huge star, but he also began his career playing extras. I can't think of anyone else."

Chow's last directorial effort – *The Mermaid* (2016) – was a record smash hit. It made more than US\$550 million at the box office and became one of China's biggest blockbusters, with a sequel on the way.

But Chow says he did not set out

to replicate *The Mermaid*'s success with his new film.

"I didn't really think about how it'll do at the box office. I just want to do what I want to do. I hope audiences identify with this film and understand the spirit of it. That's more important to me."

"I want people to know that you should always work hard because opportunities are on the horizon."

The film was reportedly not a breeze to make, however, and was in development for three years.

Chow, who wrote the script, says: "The most difficult part was developing the script. This film doesn't have any fancy graphics or effects so it asks more of the script and the way it handles characters' relationships and their emotions."

"Moreover, because there was a previous well-loved film in *King Of Comedy*, we have to take more care in preparing the script."

And one call-back to the original for die-hard fans? Cecilia Cheung,

who made her film debut opposite Chow in the original *King Of Comedy* and promptly shot to fame at 19, lends her voice to one of the characters in the new film.

Cheung, now 38, played a young hostess and Chow's love interest in the 1999 film. Chow says: "I really wanted her to star in it too, but she was pregnant and she couldn't act, so I could use only her voice."

Cheung gave birth to a son – her third child – in November last year, without revealing the identity of the father.

But while his co-stars and peers still continue to act and appear on-screen, Chow has gone behind the scenes. His last major role was in 2008's *CJ7*, which he also directed.

Chow says: "If there's a very good story or a good role, I might consider acting again. But it won't be easy to get me to do so."

• The New King Of Comedy is showing in cinemas.



Playing a feminist like herself

Keira Knightley's role as Colette allows the English actress to prove her range

**Will Lawrence
In London**

It is fitting that Keira Knightley should take the leading role in *Colette*, which charts the life and struggles of Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, regarded by some as one of the founders of feminism.

Here is a role that allows the 33-year-old English actress a chance to prove her range – portraying a woman who ages across the movie – from 19 to 34 years – and who undergoes a transformation from homely country girl to a fiercely provocative libertine and trail blazer. The film opens today.

“I was raised by a feminist; my mother was raised by a feminist,” Knightley says to media during the London Film Festival last November. “I was raised to think that I could do everything. I think my first feminist speech was when I was about 12 or 13, which was about sexism in sport. I came third, which still rankles.”

Like Colette, she has struggled to

break free of public conceptions. The daughter of actor Will Knightley and playwright Sharman MacDonald, she broke through as a football fanatic in Gurinder Chadha's pleasing pan-cultural feel-good movie *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), before waving her flag in Hollywood with the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* films from the 2000s. She has also received two Oscar nominations, including for Best Actress for 2005's *Pride & Prejudice*.

She says of Colette: “This is where I imagined or wanted my career to be going. And as far as having mastered my craft, I feel pretty set with my ability and knowledge.”

With a positive reception to *Colette* and post-WWII drama *The Aftermath* and political thriller *Official Secrets* on the horizon, she is on a hot streak at the moment.

“The thing about being hot at the moment is that you are cold the next moment,” she says with a laugh. “It goes round and round. I know that everything could explode any second and you could end up on the floor with everything shattered.”

“I just try to make films that I think I am going to like, as with *Colette*. Sometimes they don't work, with the best will in the world. I can safely say with my hand on my heart that I worked my ar** off on this film.”

Directed by Wash Westmore-

land, the film tells the story of Colette, who at the turn of last century married a successful Parisian man of letters known commonly as Willy (played by a boisterous Dominic West). In Paris, she penned a semi-autobiographical novel about a brazen country girl named Claudine, which became a bestseller and a cultural sensation. She went on to revolutionise Parisian literature, fashion and sexual expression. Colette's most celebrated works were the novels *Cheri* (1920) and *Gigi* (1944), with the latter made into a 1958 Oscar-winning musical.

“What I loved about the story was that Colette was utterly natural and she followed her sense of who she was and what she wanted to be,” the actress says. “She explored that without fear and without shame.”

Colette was seen as a provocateur by many, embracing the notion of same-sex relationships and unabashedly flaunting her nudity when acting on stage.

“She didn't label herself as one thing or another and she didn't set herself against anything,” continues Knightley.

The film has been a labour of love for its director, even more so than its star.

Westmoreland and his professional partner and husband Richard Glatzer started work on the

screenplay in 2001, though other projects and then a personal tragedy saw the project waylaid.

In 2014, the pair completed writing and directing the Alzheimer's disease drama *Still Alice* together. Glatzer, meanwhile, had been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, which leads to the weakening of muscles.

As his body began to fail, Westmoreland wondered aloud one day what project they should do next. Using an iPad text-to-voice app with one of his toes, Glatzer answered: “C-O-L-E-T-T-E”. He died in March 2015.

“It was a very difficult, very dark time and I was in deep grief,” Westmoreland says. “But I knew that I wanted to make Colette and extend Richard's legacy.”

The cast all feel a special responsibility to Colette. Knightley agreed to the leading role despite only recently (in 2015) having given birth to her daughter, her only child with her husband, musician James Righton.

“We did Colette's make-up at my flat in the morning, so that my kid could be around and I could have breakfast with her and that was cool,” she recalls. “I had lots of toys in my trailer; it looked like a creche.”

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• Colette opens today.

Biopic lacks boldness of the woman it portrays

REVIEW/BIOPIC DRAMA

COLETTE (R21)
112 minutes/Opens Feb 7/★★★☆☆

The story: A young woman from small-town France marries her father's army buddy and they settle down in Paris. The new wife is Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette (Keira Knightley), a woman intimidated by her older husband's cosmopolitan ways. Willy (Dominic West) is a literary figure known as much for his bon vivant lifestyle as he is for his books. She starts writing fiction, under his name, in a bid to stave off financial ruin. In years to come, she will be known for her books, the most famous of which is *Gigi*, on which the 1958 hit musical of the same name is based.

John Lui

There are biographical movies in which everything builds up to The Moment in which the main character goes from ordinary to extraordinary.

Knightley's character, in contrast, evolves in small but significant stages: from drab country mouse to hesitant author to toast of Paris and taboo-breaking symbol of female emancipation.

There is never a dull moment in her transition from a woman afraid of sticking out to a rebel whose affairs at once scandalised and fascinated the city. The creators of this story suffer from an embarrassment of riches, not least visually, because the timeline covers the inter-war period when Paris was boiling over with new ideas in music, art and literature. Thankfully, there is little desperate name-dropping of the “Hi, Picasso, I'm Hemingway, and this is Dali” variety.

In fact, most of the names spoken of here are lost to time, among them Colette's husband Willy, played here by West with appropriately aggressive bonhomie. In one of the film's numerous nods to the modern world, Willy is a brand, an author who puts his name on the work of the unknowns who sign their rights to him.

Director Wash Westmoreland made his name with *Still Alice* (2014), the diary of Alzheimer's disease that earned Julianne Moore a Best Actress Oscar. Knightley does some of her finest work yet in this film, playing a woman who emerges from her shell, socially and sexually. She is a product of liberal Jazz Age Paris and her own fierce passions. Despite her fame, she pays a price for her unconventional lifestyle.

Tonally, Westmoreland keeps things tidy and restrained – perhaps too much so. The more lurid and tabloid-worthy Colette's life becomes in the bedrooms and theatre stages on which she based her later career, the more the reins are pulled in.

Respectful and tasteful? Yes, but it would have been better if this biopic's storytelling style matched the boldness of the woman it seeks to portray.

The pain of family reunions for singletons

**John Lui
Film Correspondent**

It is a familiar lament, one that has become a bitter joke for singles. During Chinese New Year, parents and extended family interrogate unmarried persons, then offer romantic advice of the kind that went out of date around the mid-1970s.

In the documentary *The Silk And The Flame*, director Jordan Schiele follows Yao, a single man in his late 30s living in Beijing, over several days spent with his parents in rural Henan province during the festive period.

The film is now showing at The Projector.

Family reunions are meant to be joyful affairs, but for gay men like Yao, it is a time of unrelenting anxiety. He cannot let his cover story slip, lest he embarrass his family, so he has to put up with the hectoring and guilt-tripping, which have

grown in intensity after his father's debilitating strokes. Yao is compared unfavourably with his older brother, who is married and a father.

For Schiele, 34, an American, the film is a look at how people communicate, in the ways they open channels or block them. The barriers to openness are not just psychological or social: Yao's mother has been hearing- and speaking-impaired for much of her life and gets her thoughts across using a home-crafted system of gestures, while his father is an invalid who keeps silent.

“His mother physically cannot speak, while his father has chosen not to speak because he has lost faith in his ability to recover and in his youngest son. Yao cannot speak openly.”

“This is a family that is close. They have great affection for each other, but there is a barrier between them,” says Schiele in a telephone interview with The Straits Times from Shanghai.

The film-maker, who is fluent in

Mandarin and conducts interviews in Silk, moves frequently between the United States and different parts of Asia. Between 2008 and 2011, he studied film at the now-closed New York University Tisch School of the Arts Asia in Singapore.

He considers the film a collaboration between himself and Yao, a well-established planner of arts and culture exhibitions in Beijing. After the two became friends years ago, the planner suggested that Schiele, then known for his short documentaries, come to Henan to make a film about his family's story, one marked by struggles with poverty, upheavals in modern Chinese history, self-reliance and personal ingenuity – his mother's sign language, for example, was born of necessity after she married his father. She grew up in a time before schools for the deaf were available for the rural poor.

As they explored ideas for the documentary, the arts planner's personal story began to grow in importance.



The Silk And The Flame follows Yao (left), a single man in his late 30s living in Beijing, over several days spent with his parents in rural Henan province during the festive period.
PHOTO: THE PROJECTOR

“In the process of making the film, it became cathartic for him to share what can be shared,” says Schiele.

The director opted to make *Silk* in monochrome, a choice that happened for both artistic and practical reasons. He wanted the film to look timeless and for audiences to focus on the faces rather than the surroundings, he says.

Also, Yao's mother's flamboyant

festive clothing proved a challenge. “After a week of shooting, I watched the footage. His mother wears a coat with many textures and many, many colours. I was very distracted and didn't want the audience to focus on what she was wearing,” he says.

• The *Silk And The Flame* is showing at The Projector.

Telemad



Saniyya Sidney and Mark-Paul Gosselaar (both above) star in *The Passage*; and Elizabeth Lail and Penn Badgley (both right) are in *You*. PHOTOS: FOX, NETLIX

Killer infatuation and infection

Boy-meets-girl story You has a sick twist, while The Passage covers familiar ground with a dangerous virus



Alison de Souza

Netflix holds its viewing data close to its chest – except when the numbers are especially brag-worthy, which is why it revealed last month that the series *You* was set to hit 40 million views on its streaming platform. Setting aside the fact that it counts watching at least 70 per cent of one episode as a “view”, that seems like a colossal audience. And what makes this even more noteworthy is the show was a ratings flop when it first aired on a conventional television network in the United States in September last year.

You is a boy-meets-girl story with

a sick twist: The boy – bookstore manager Joe (Gossip Girl’s Penn Badgley) – turns out to be a psychopath who stalks a customer he is smitten with, Beck (Elizabeth Lail), and manipulates her into a relationship with him. Presumably, some of those 40 million viewers made it through only the first episode – but that opener is as well crafted as any. It is pulpy and trashy enough to make it easy to watch despite some eye-rolling plot developments, but with just enough satire – about social media and modern romance – to prod the binge viewers into some reflection.

Joe is an unreliable narrator, which lets the show stagger its revelations about just how unhealthy his fixation with Beck is. It layers that with evidence of his better qualities – his charm, intelligence and kindness towards his neighbour’s son. Some of this is demonstrated with little finesse, but by the time viewers see how awful he really is, and just how bad for Beck, they will be thoroughly conflicted. There will be extra discomfiture for those who found themselves rooting for the relationship at various points, as romantic fiction conditions viewers to do. Rather than the obvious readings of the show as a cautionary tale for

the #MeToo or social-media age, this is where *You* is most subversive. Early episodes of **The Passage**, on the other hand, offer little that is unexpected. To save the world from disease – including an impending bird flu pandemic – American scientists are secretly experimenting on death-row prisoners, injecting them with a virus that makes them disease-resistant, but also turns them into murderous vampires. Believing a child subject could resist the virus’ downside, they send federal agent Brad Wolgast (Mark-Paul Gosselaar) to bring them an orphan girl – whom no one will miss – so they can experiment on her. But he changes his mind when he meets little Amy (Saniyya Sidney) and decides to go on the run to protect her. The first issue with this set-up is not so much apocalypse-, vampire- or virus-fatigue – audiences have seemingly endless appetites for all the above. Rather, it is the all-too-familiar, unimaginative execution. The initial vampire scares are decent enough, but they wear thin quickly because it is nothing viewers have not seen before, either in the creepiness factor or the gore. The notion of well-meaning

scientists unleashing horrors on the world dates back to Frankenstein, but the fertile theme could have been probed far more thoughtfully and inventively than it is here. Instead, the rationale is them trying to stop an unseen Asian epidemic and that other old chestnut, save a dying spouse. The one bright spot in the three episodes previewed is Amy. Sidney portrays her with charm and sass, and her playful banter with Wolgast redeems Gosselaar’s bland performance somewhat. But the series – based on an acclaimed trilogy of novels that span centuries – better have a few more tricks up its sleeve.

stlife@sph.com.sg

VIEW IT / YOU

Netflix
★★★★☆

THE PASSAGE

Tuesdays at 9pm on Fox (Singtel TV Channel 330, StarHub TV Channel 505) and streaming on Fox+

★★★★☆

Exclusively for The Straits Times subscribers

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The contest ends on Feb 8 and the winner will be informed by Feb 18. The travel period is between March and May 2019.

The winner is required to participate in a media interview prior to the trip and to share photos on his or her social media during his or her stay. Other terms and conditions apply.

Read the story here: str.sg/hiddenvalley

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You is proof of Netflix’s grip on younger viewers

WASHINGTON • This past autumn, Ms Ashley Thomas of Los Angeles got quickly hooked on a new Lifetime drama titled *You*, starring Penn Badgley of Gossip Girl (2007 to 2012) as a psychotic stalker who becomes obsessed with a woman who visits his bookstore. She urged her friends, especially those who were Gossip Girl fans, to check it out, but they mostly ignored her suggestion. “They shrugged it off because it was on Lifetime,” said Ms Thomas, 23. Fast-forward two months: Netflix, which acquired the rights to *You* early last year, launched it on the streaming service the day after Christmas. Suddenly, social media blew up as viewers obsessed over the twisted, addicting series. Ms Thomas’ friends started asking her: Had she heard of this great new Netflix show called *You*? It starred the guy from Gossip Girl – she might like it. After the fourth recommendation, Ms Thomas fired off a tweet. “I would really appreciate it if people stopped thinking that *You* is a new show now that it’s repackaged as a Netflix Original. You didn’t discover it. It was on Lifetime for 10 weeks,” she wrote. “Stop telling me to watch a show I already watched weeks ago.” Ms Thomas is far from the only one annoyed by the recent popularity of *You* and its now-common description as a “Netflix show”. Twitter is currently filled with similar missives, from TV critics (The Washington Post’s Hank Stuever:

“Also depressing: reviewing it, thoughtfully and with advice to watch it back in September, only to be ‘informed’ by your readers of its existence once it goes to Netflix”) to viewers (“The people watching *You* on Netflix are fake fans to those of us that watched it on Lifetime.”) In an e-mail to The Washington Post, Badgley said he was not surprised by the surge in attention from new Netflix viewers. “We’re grateful to Lifetime for being the gateway to getting the show made. We wouldn’t have been able to make the show without them, as far as I can tell,” Badgley said. “There is no sense of bewilderment that the show had one reaction while it was on Lifetime and another when it went to Netflix. The difference in viewership is obvious and it’s indicative of so many different things, not the least of which is the way young people consume media.” But to some in the industry, it is more than just another example of the behemoth streaming platform boosting the profile of a TV show, such as the spike in popularity of The CW TV Network’s *Riverdale* or a new generation discovering NBC’s *Friends*. This is perhaps the most stark example yet of the iron grip Netflix has on younger viewers and a fascinating case study for where the increasingly fractured future of TV is headed. For one thing, it shows basic cable channels that rely on scripted content are in for a uniquely tough road ahead.

They do not offer easy binge-watching like streaming services; they do not have news or sports like broadcast networks; they cannot be R-rated like premium channels; and they do not have the budget to cast, say, Julia Roberts (Amazon Prime’s *Homecoming*) or Emma Stone (Netflix’s *Maniac*). Plus, as former network executive Tom Nunan said, even if they could afford a major movie star, who knows whether their audience would watch? “In this marketplace, how do channels like these survive? That’s the chill that goes down the necks of these guys,” said Mr Nunan, former president of United Paramount Network and a professor at the UCLA School of Theatre, Film and Television. “It isn’t ‘Netflix gets to buy whatever it wants’, which is a daily truth they have to swallow, but, ‘How are we going to survive?’ That’s the harder truth they’re facing.” It becomes a difficult question: Whose fault is it if a show fails? Does a series such as *You* flop on cable simply because of audience bias against traditional cable networks? Or are those networks not accurately catering to their audience? In reality, it was not a fair fight. Netflix has the ability to cater to exactly what its subscribers want – to splash recommendations across the home screen as a suggestion to viewers looking for something similar to Gossip Girl. That tactic won out over Life-

time’s traditional platform. As writer Richard Rushfield said: “You have to look at the reality of who the audience is, and consider a show that gets buzz on Netflix might not cause a ripple here.” “What Netflix has shown the ability to do, beyond what almost anyone else can do right now, is create a sensation,” said Rushfield, editor of entertainment industry newsletter The Ankler. “I’m not sure how much of it is it managing and consciously creating that, or sensations just arising out of its shows.” It is hard to tell: Recently, Sandra Bullock’s *Bird Box* became a viral hit, despite being mediocre. Marie Kondo has urged people to declutter for years, but once her show hit Netflix, thrift stores around the United States saw a spike in donations. Of course, it is all part of Netflix’s two-decade-long effort to get to know everything about its users and target shows such as *You* directly to them, in order to keep them renewing their subscriptions. According to Gina Keating, author of *Netflixed: The Epic Battle For America’s Eyeballs*, the company watches you as you watch television: when you stream, what time you stream, where you are, what kind of device, what shows you watch. Basically, whatever patterns it can discern from your viewing habits. “It’s creepy in a way, but also endearing,” Keating said. “It figures out a way to straddle that line between creepy, and feeling like it knows you.” WASHINGTON POST

Comics

BABY BLUES



GARFIELD



Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)
9.00 Lang Lang – New York Rhapsody (Cul)
10.45 Just For Laughs Gags 18 (V)
11.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
PM
12.00 Hollywood's Ultimate Countdown Show (PG) (V)
12.30 Stars In Style 4 (PG) (V)
1.00 Films & Stars: End Of Year Special 2018 (PG) (V)
2.00 Make You Laugh Out Loud 3 (V)
3.00 Thursday Afternoon Movie: Walking On Sunshine (PG) (M)
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
7.00 America's Got Talent: The Champions (PG) (V)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 Talking Point 2018 (CA)
10.00 Holiday Movie: Before I Go To Sleep (PG13) (M) (Premiere)
AM
12.00 Code Of Law 4 (PG13) (D)
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
2.40 Films & Stars: End Of Year Special 2018 (PG) (V)
3.40 Make You Laugh Out Loud 3 (V)
4.30 Lang Lang – New York Rhapsody (Cul)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Golden Age Talentime (CC) (V)
7.00 Sidewalk Scientist (IE)
7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (HD) (News)
8.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (HD) (News)
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 Comfort Food Recipes 2 (Chinese New Year Specials) (IE)
10.30 Night Market Life Aka Life (PG) (D)
PM
12.30 Counterfake 2 (V)

1.00 News 8 At One (HD)
1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Little Counsellor (HD) (S)
2.30 The Precedents (PG) (D)
3.30 Golden Melody (V)
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)
5.30 When Duty Calls (PG) (CC) (D)
6.30 Hello Singapore (CA)
7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Fun with SINGnese (CC) (IE)
9.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 News Tonight (HD)
10.30 Focus (CC) (CA)
11.00 Call Of Heroes (PG13) (CC) (M)
AM
1.30 Chef Apprentice (V)
2.25 A Time To Dance (D) (Finale)
4.10 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

PM
3.00 Unique Lodging (CC) (IE)
4.00 The Food Detectives (IE)
4.30 Working Golden Holidays (IE)
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 The Girl Who Sees Smells (PG) (CC) (D)
7.00 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 World Food (CC) (IE)
10.00 Brother's Keeper 2 (PG13) (CC) (D)
11.00 News Tonight
11.30 World Food (IE)
AM
12.30 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
2.30 Close

CNA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
6.30 The Making Of Singapore On Film
7.00 First Look Asia
9.00 Asia Business First
10.02 Real Deal
11.00 News Now
PM
1.02 Champions For Change
2.00 News Now
4.02 Real Deal
5.00 News Now

7.02 Champions For Change (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
9.02 Insight (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight
11.02 Champions For Change
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Power List Asia 5
1.02 Insight
2.00 News Now
2.30 Asia Exposed
3.02 Real Deal
4.30 Power List Asia 5
5.02 Insight

VASANTHAM

PM
3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)
3.30 Aasai Aasaiya – Cooking For Love (IE)
4.00 Priyasakhi (D)
4.30 Thedal – Star Search 2016 (HD) (V)
5.30 Mighty Raju Animation Series (S)
6.00 Ishq Ka Rang Safed (PG) (D) (Hindi)
7.00 Konjam Soru Konjam Varalaru (CC) (Cul)
7.30 Hands That Shaped The Nation: The Merdeka Generation (IE)
8.00 Uyire (PG) (CC) (D)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Kanavu Meipada 2 (CC) (IE)
10.00 Rowthiram (PG13) (CC) (D)
10.30 Nijangal (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 Nyabagam Varuthae 3 (V)
11.30 Ethiroli 15 (HD) (CA)
AM
12.00 Tamil Seithi (News) (R)
12.30 Close

OKTO

AM
9.00 Tip The Mouse (P)
9.30 Teddies (P)
10.00 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)
10.30 Sesame Street (P)
11.00 Mouk (P)
11.30 Ready Jet Go! (P)
PM
12.00 Hiccup & Sneeze (P)
12.30 Teddies (P)
1.00 Coconut The Little Dragon (P)

1.30 Tip The Mouse (P)
2.00 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)
2.30 Sesame Street (P)
3.00 Mouk (P)
3.30 Ready Jet Go! (P)
4.00 Odd Squad (S)
4.30 Captain Flinn And The Pirate Dinosaurs (S)
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (S)
5.30 Marcus Level (S)
6.00 OddBods (HD) (S)
6.30 Exlosers 2 (D)
7.00 My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic (S)
7.30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (HD) (CC) (S)
8.00 Turning Mecard (S)
8.30 Inazuma Eleven (HD) (CC) (S)
9.00 BWF Grand Prix – German Open 2018 (Sports)
11.00 American Ninja Warrior 6 (HD) (PG) (Sports)
AM
12.00 Close

SURIA

PM
4.00 Seindah Takdir Cinta (PG) (D)
5.00 Hilang Kasih Di Sarajevo (CC) (PG) (D)
6.00 Kisah Kita (S)
6.30 Masak-Masak Ringan (IE)
7.00 Makmum Yang Paling Aku Cinta (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Sentuhan Harapan (CC) (IE) (Debut)
9.30 Kultus (CC) (D) (Debut)
10.30 InstaGeram (PG) (CC) (D)
11.30 Berita (HD) (News) (R)
AM
12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs;
CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture;
D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies;
P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance;
R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom;
V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

TheStarsSay

Aries (March 21 - April 19)
You should meet someone new. With your positive energy, you should find that you all get along well.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)
Someone is pushing back hard against your plan. Now is the time to hold your ground.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)
Deal with someone who is uncommunicative – use your social energy to get him to open up.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)
You are feeling suspicious of people. As long as you can satisfy yourself that all is well, you can relax.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)
Your mind is open to great ideas . You may also be learning new things about the people you like best.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)
Take the time to make sense of your finances. Be honest about the situation and things will get easier.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)
Take care of all your relationships. Things are getting freaky, but with your help, everyone can thrive.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)
Try your best to avoid getting into fights. You are not ready to consider all the possibilities in a battle.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)
You are feeling good. Throw a party or ask someone out – there is not a better time for either.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)
Stick to the same old routines, but find a way to cope with repetitive stress.

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)
Help people see beyond their imaginations. But do not push them too far.

Pisces (Feb 19 - March 20)
Someone is trying your patience and testing to see if you are a good mark for his nefarious schemes.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

Radio

KISS92

AM
6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning
10.00 Carol Smith
PM
1.00 Charmaine Yee
4.00 Shan Wee
8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

AM
6.00 ONE FM's #1 Breakfast Show With Glenn And The Flying Dutchman
10.00 Cheryl Miles
PM
4.00 Weekdays With ONE FM

MONEY FM 89.3

AM
6.00 The Breakfast Huddle With Elliott Danker, Yasmin Jonkers & Ryan Huang
10.00 Midday With Howie Lim
PM
2.00 Prime Time With Claressa Monteiro
4.00 The Curve With Michelle Martin & Bernard Lim
UFM100.3
AM
6.00 UFM100.3 Mornings With Wenhong, Limei & Xiaozhu
10.00 Lively Life With Kemín
PM
1.00 Tea With Yuling
4.00 Sing-a-long With Xinying & Weilong
8.00 Feel The Night With Chengyao

96.3 HAO FM

AM
6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jing Yun, De Ming And Jie Qi
10.00 Lunch Break With Anna
PM
1.00 Automation
4.00 Evening Drive Time With Li Yi And Guo Xian
8.00 Night Time With Wei Wen

Tides

SUN RISE/SET TIME: 7:17am/7:21pm
MOON RISE/SET TIME: 8:56am/8:14pm

TIDES TODAY: Singapore: 1.11am (2.8m), 6.33am (1.4m), 12.24pm (3.1m), 7.05pm (0.6m). Desaru: 12.52am (2.7m), 6.22am (1.6m), 11.50am (2.6m), 6.20pm (0.8m). Port Dickson: 2.34am (0.2m), 8.09am (2.5m), 2.57pm (0.3m), 8.38pm (2.5m). Mersing: 6.29am (1.8m), 11.29am (2.5m), 5.50pm (1m).

TIDES TOMORROW: Singapore: 1.33am (2.8m), 7.07am (1.3m), 12.56pm (3.1m), 7.37pm (0.6m). Desaru: 1.16am (2.7m), 6.52am (1.6m), 12.30pm (2.6m), 6.52pm (0.9m). Port Dickson: 3.05am (0.3m), 8.38am (2.5m), 3.20pm (0.3m), 9.02pm (2.5m). Mersing: 12.49am (3.1m), 6.53am (1.7m), 12.08pm (2.5m), 6.17pm (1.1m).

For updates and more details, call Meteorological Service Singapore, NEA, on 6542-7788 or go to www.nea.gov.sg

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
8.30 Swamp People 8
9.30 Ancient Aliens 10
10.25 History Drama: Project Blue Book
PM
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 4
1.10 Swamp People 8
2.05 Pawn Stars 18
2.35 Storage Wars: Texas 6
3.00 Storage Wars 10
3.30 History Drama: Project Blue Book
5.20 Hunting Hitler 2
6.15 Swamp People 8
7.10 Pawn Stars 18
8.05 Storage Wars 12
8.30 Storage Wars 10
9.00 Forged In Fire 5
9.55 Forged In Fire: Knife Or Death
10.50 History Drama: Knightfall
11.45 The Curse Of Oak Island 4

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
6.00 Dance Moms 7
7.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2
8.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
9.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
10.00 Growing Up Supermodel
11.00 Atlanta Plastic
PM
12.00 Dance Moms 7
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
2.00 I'll Be Watching
3.35 Married At First Sight Australia 4
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
6.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2
7.00 This Time Next Year
8.00 Born This Way 2
9.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
10.00 Gone
11.35 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
9.10 Batman Vs Two-Face
10.20 The Fate Of The Furious (NC16)
PM
12.35 Kong: Skull Island (NC16)
2.30 True Detective 3 (NC16)
3.30 Despicable Me 3
5.00 The HBO Movie Show
5.25 Finding Dory
7.05 Cowboys & Aliens (NC16)
9.00 Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens
11.15 Crashing 3 (NC16)
11.45 High Maintenance 3 (M18)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
7.35 Get Smart's Bruce And Lloyd Out Of Control
8.45 Dance Flick (NC16)
10.05 Locusts: The 8th Plague
11.35 The Godfather 3
PM
2.20 Killing Gunther (NC16)

3.55 Driven
5.50 Escape To Victory
7.45 The HBO Movie Show
8.10 Red (PG)
10.00 Strike Back 6 (NC16)
11.00 John Wick: Chapter 2 (M18)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
7.00 Signal (HD)
8.15 Gourmet Breakfast (HD)
8.45 Jiangsu Spring Festival (HD)
PM
12.15 Still Loving You (HD)
1.30 Signal (HD)
2.45 Back To Youth (HD)
4.15 The Way To Wellness (HD)
4.45 Still Loving You (HD)
6.00 Dowry (HD)
7.00 Hot Door Night Chinese New Year Special (Part 2) (HD)
9.00 Easy Cooking Chinese New Year Special (HD)
9.30 Fun Abroad (HD)
10.00 Noble Aspirations (HD)
11.00 Hot Door Night Chinese New Year Special (Part 2) (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
7.00 ISU European Figure Skating Championships 2019: Ladies' Free Skating
PM
12.00 Tennis: ATP 500 ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament 2018 Day 7: Finals
2.00 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
2.30 Snooker: 2018 European Masters Finals Highlights
6.00 Motorsports: FIA World RallyCross Championship 2018 Round 7 Canada Highlights
7.00 Tennis: Deuce 2019
7.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
8.00 Snooker: 2018 English Open Semi-finals Highlights
11.30 Spirit Of Yachting 2018 Show 6: Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race (Alive & Kicking)

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
8.30 Magazine: Trans World Sport 2019
9.30 Asean Basketball League 2018/19 Mono Vampire Vs Singapore Slingers
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport TV
PM
12.00 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 4 Sydney: Matches 37 To 40 Semi-finals
1.30 The Football Review
2.00 National Basketball League Round 17 New Zealand Breakers Vs Adelaide 36ers (Live)
4.00 Football: The EFL Highlights 2018/19
4.30 Wrestling: WWE Raw (PG13)
7.00 Fiba World Basketball 2019
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport TV
8.00 Wrestling: WWE Smackdown (PG)
9.30 National Basketball League Round 17 New Zealand Breakers Vs Adelaide 36ers
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport TV

Singtel TV

CARTOON NETWORK (CHANNEL 226)

AM
6.00 Oggy & The Cockroaches
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
8.00 Running Man Animation
9.00 Grizzy And The Lemmings
9.30 The Tom And Jerry Show
10.00 We Bare Bears
10.30 Supernooobs
11.00 The Powerpuff Girls
PM
12.00 Teen Titans Go!
1.00 We Bare Bears
2.00 Ninjago: Masters Of Spinjitzu
2.30 Craig Of The Creek
3.00 Rat-A-Tat
3.30 The Amazing World Of Gumball
4.00 We Bare Bears
4.30 The Powerpuff Girls
5.00 Teen Titans Go!
5.30 Craig Of The Creek
6.00 Ben 10 Challenge
6.30 Oggy & The Cockroaches
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
7.30 Grizzy And The Lemmings
7.55 The Heroic Quest Of The Valiant Prince Ivandoe
8.00 We Bare Bears
9.00 The Powerpuff Girls
10.00 Regular Show
10.30 Steven Universe
11.00 Clarence
11.30 Adventure Time

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 MacGyver 2
6.50 Criminal Minds: Suspect Behavior
7.40 Team Ninja Warrior
8.30 Rude(sh) Tube
9.00 Asia's Got Talent 2
PM
4.00 Hotel Transylvania 2
5.50 The Karate Kid (2010)
8.30 Asia's Got Talent 3
10.30 MacGyver 3
11.20 Asia's Got Talent 3

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 The Carbonaro Effect
6.25 The Carbonaro Effect 2
6.50 Major Crimes 5
7.40 DC's Legends Of Tomorrow
8.25 Person Of Interest 4
9.15 The Flash 3
10.05 Almost Genius
10.30 The Man From U.N.C.L.E.
PM
12.40 Wonder Boy
2.25 The Carbonaro Effect

2.50 The Carbonaro Effect 2
3.15 Almost Genius
4.05 The Flash 3
4.55 Person Of Interest 4
5.40 Major Crimes 5
6.30 The Flash 3
7.20 The Big Bang Theory 9
7.45 The Legend Of Tarzan
9.50 Jack The Giant Slayer
11.55 Pan

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 At Midnight With Chris Hardwick 2
6.25 The Daily Show 24
6.55 Just For Laughs Gags 14
7.20 Mr Bean
7.50 Most Ridiculous
8.15 Amazingness
8.40 Mr Bean
9.10 Caraoke Showdown
9.35 Just For Laughs Gags 14
10.00 Hot In Cleveland
10.50 Mr Bean
11.20 Saturday Night Live 43
PM
12.05 The Daily Show 24
12.30 The Goldbergs 5
1.20 Hot In Cleveland 6
2.10 Saturday Night Live 43
2.55 The Burn With Jeff Ross 2
3.15 Above Average Presents
3.25 Jeff Ross Presents Roast Battle
4.15 The Goldbergs 5
5.05 Hot In Cleveland 6
5.55 The Daily Show 24
6.20 Above Average Presents
6.25 Your Face Or Mine 4
6.50 Amazingness
7.15 Billy On The Street 3
7.40 Most Ridiculous
8.35 The Goldbergs 5
9.25 Hot In Cleveland 6
10.15 Inglorious Pranksters
10.30 Inside Amy Schumer 2
11.00 The Jim Jefferies Show
11.25 Above Average Presents
11.30 The Daily Show 24

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
8.30 The Golden Melodies 2018
10.00 Love Scams
PM
12.00 Stylish Man Chinese New Year Special 2019
1.00 In The Name Of Love
2.00 100% Wife
4.00 Entrepreneurial Age
5.00 First Love
6.00 In The Name Of Love
7.00 100% Wife
9.00 First Love
10.00 Entrepreneurial Age
11.00 Eagle And Youngster

Oscars ceremony won't have a host

LOS ANGELES • Following weeks of speculation, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has finally confirmed that this year's Oscars ceremony will not have a host.

Ms Karey Burke, entertainment chief at ABC, the network that will carry the show, addressed this development on Tuesday during an event for the Television Critics Association's winter press tour.

"The main goal, which I was told was what the academy promised ABC last year, after a very lengthy telecast, was to keep the show to three hours," Ms Burke said. "So the producers, I think, wisely decided to not have a host and to go back to having the presenters and the movies be the stars, and that will be the best way that we kind of keep the show at a brisk three hours."

The academy announced its intentions to limit the telecast to three hours last August, a few months before Ms Burke was hired.

That change seemed to be a reaction to a continuing decline in viewership as last year's nearly four-hour telecast saw a 19 per cent fall in viewership from the previous year's and hit an all-time low of only 26.5 million viewers. Nonetheless, the ceremony's director went on to win an Emmy in September.

This year's Oscars ceremony seems to have been shaped by public fury more than any other in recent history. Soon after comedian

Kevin Hart was named host in early December, several of his old homophobic tweets and jokes resurfaced, sparking widespread outrage.

He issued an apology and eventually backed out, went on Ellen DeGeneres' talk show and said he would reconsider the gig after she vouched for him, but eventually backed out again.

An already undesirable job became even more so.

"There was a messiness behind the Kevin Hart situation," Ms Burke said. "After that, it was pretty clear that we were going to stay the course. There was an idea that we were going to just have presenters host the Oscars and we all got on-board with that idea pretty quickly."

All that said, getting rid of the host will not necessarily prevent controversy. The only other time the Oscars ceremony has been host-less throughout its 91-year history was in 1989, when actress Eileen Bowman dressed as Snow White and actor Rob Lowe, her Prince Charming, made their way through a painful 15-minute opening musical number that left audience members disgusted.

Ms Burke told television critics on Tuesday that this year's ceremony would still include "an exciting opening". The Oscars ceremony will be held on Feb 24.

WASHINGTON POST

On social media



BACK FOR THE NEW YEAR: Chinese actress Fan Bingbing, who was embroiled in a tax evasion scandal last year, posted four selfies of herself with little make-up on Weibo on Monday, the eve of Chinese New Year. The photos were accompanied with the caption "Love you all! Happy new year!". Fan has largely vanished from social media after she was involved in a scandal last year over her alleged inking of the so-called "yin-and-yang contracts" in a bid to avoid paying more taxes. The practice involves having one contract spell out the actual payment, while submitting a different one to the tax authorities to declare less income. PHOTO: WEIBO/FAN BINGBING

Jennifer Lawrence engaged to art gallery director

NEW YORK • Oscar-winning actress Jennifer Lawrence, one of the most popular film stars in the world, is engaged to her boyfriend, an art gallery director, multiple media outlets reported on Tuesday.

Her future husband is Mr Cooke Maroney, 34, her representative confirmed to People Magazine, the publication reported on its website.

Lawrence 28, was spotted wearing a "massive ring" and enjoying what appeared to be a celebratory dinner with Mr Maroney at a French restaurant in New York City recently, according to Page Six, which reports on celebrities.

She won the best actress Oscar for her role in the 2012 romantic comedy Silver Linings Playbook. Also known for her role as the heroine archer Katniss Everdene in the blockbuster Hunger Games film series (2012 to 2015), Lawrence has been nominated for three other Oscars for her roles in Winter's Bone (2010), American Hustle (2013) and Joy (2015).

Mr Maroney is an art gallery director at the Gladestone Gallery in New York, USA Today reported.

No date for the nuptials has been announced. REUTERS

Cold Pursuit events canned over Neeson's 'revenge' remarks



NEW YORK • The red carpet events before the New York premiere of Liam Neeson's new film were cancelled on Tuesday, one day after the publication of remarks in which the actor (left) described once seeking revenge for the rape of a friend by walking the streets looking for a black man to kill.

Neeson appeared on television show Good Morning America (GMA) on Tuesday to explain the remarks, which he made during an interview with a British newspaper, The Independent, last month while promoting his new film, Cold Pursuit.

The comments were met with outrage on Monday and drew condemnation from civil rights advocates.

On Tuesday, Neeson said: "I'm not a racist."

He said the episode happened roughly 40 years ago after he learned that a close friend had been raped by an assailant she described as a black man. He told The Independent that he went out looking for a black man "to kill him", but he avoided that specific language on Tuesday.

"After that there were some

nights when I went out deliberately into black areas in the city looking to be set upon so that I could unleash physical violence," Neeson said. "And I did it for, I'd say, maybe four or five times."

The red carpet events on Tuesday, which would have exposed Neeson and his co-stars to reporters, cameras and more questions, were cancelled hours before they were scheduled to begin, according to a spokesman for Lionsgate, which is distributing the film.

The spokesman said Lionsgate

would make no statement on Neeson's remarks.

In his interview with GMA, Neeson said he would have responded with a similar "primal urge" if his friend's attacker had been white. And he said he thought his impulse to violence might have been connected to growing up during the conflict in Northern Ireland, which ended in 1998.

He said he overcame his anger by talking with friends, going to confession with a Catholic priest and, "believe it or not, power walking, two hours every day". NYTIMES

21 Savage a 'Dreamer', say lawyers



NEW YORK • The lawyers battling to save Grammy-nominated rapper 21 Savage (left) from deportation from the United States appealed on Tuesday for compassion, casting him as one of the blameless 1.8 million "Dreamers" - immigrants brought in illegally as children through no fault of their own.

The 26-year-old chart-topper - real name Sha Yaa Abraham-Joseph - was detained in the southern city of Atlanta on Sunday by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(ICE) agents who say he is British and has been living in the US illegally after his visa expired in 2006.

"Mr Abraham-Joseph, like almost two million of his immigrant child peers, was left without immigration status as a young child with no way to fix his immigration status," his six attorneys said in a joint statement. "These 'Dreamers' come from all walks of life and every ethnicity."

The statement said 21 Savage arrived in the country at the age of

seven and had been in the US continually for almost 20 years, save for a brief trip to Britain in 2005.

They acknowledged that he was British and lost his legal status in the US "through no fault of his own" in 2006, but added that his three children who are American citizens make him eligible for deportation relief.

His lawyers also argue that 21 Savage is no flight risk and that, because of family ties in the US and his length of residence, he is entitled to

appeal against deportation and should be released on bail from ICE custody in Georgia.

They denied a claim by ICE that the artist was convicted of felony drug charges in October 2014.

21 Savage is up on Sunday for two Grammys for his work on fellow rapper Post Malone's smash hit Rockstar, including for the major Record of the Year award.

He released his debut studio album, Issa Album, in 2017.

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